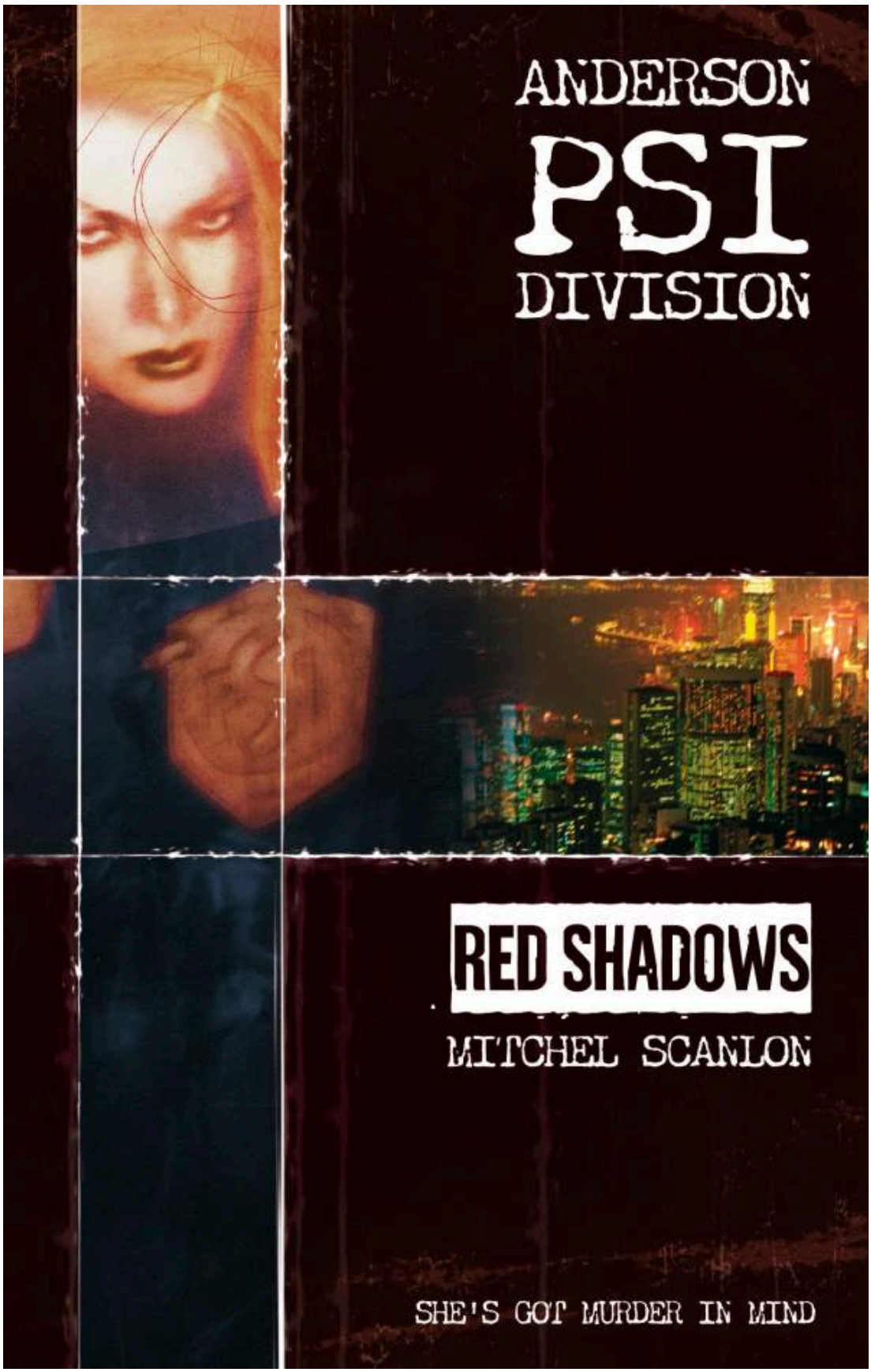
ANDERSON

PSI DIVISION

RED SHADOWS

MITCHEL SCANLON

SHE'S GOT MURDER IN MIND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RED SHADOWS
MITCHEL SCANLON
SHE'S GOT MURDER IN MIND

Judge Anderson created by **John Wagner & Brian Bolland**.

To Naomi - you didn't think I'd forget you, sis?

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David Bishop

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#4: ECLIPSE
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#5: KINGDOM OF THE BLIND
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Matthew Smith

#7: SWINE FEVER
Andrew Cartmel

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#1: OPERATION VAMPYR
#2: THE BLOOD RED ARMY
#3: TWILIGHT OF THE DEAD

ANDERSON PSI DIVISION

It is the year 2126. Atomic war has decimated humanity, and the world is a bleak wasteland, inhabited by mutants and freaks. Most people live in vast, walled cities that keep the lethal winds and foul inhabitants outside at bay; after all, the cities have enough problems of their own to deal with. Boredom is endemic, unemployment is sky high and so is the crime rate, as the cramped Meg citizens strive to survive any way they can. As the population booms and tensions rise, the authorities know that they must use an iron fist to keep the teeming millions in check.

In Mega-City One, home to four hundred million, the Law is king. Justice is upheld by the implacable Judges - empowered to act as judge, jury and executioner - and intent on sending criminals to jail or an early grave. But a new threat is emerging. Radioactivity slowly works its insidious voodoo on the population, warping not just flesh, but also minds. People with dangerous talents stalk the shadows: telekinetics, pyromaniacs, telepaths and psychos. Some seek to use their talents for criminal ends and others try to hide them, fearful of recrimination. Whatever the case, in the eyes of the Law, they are all criminals, and they need bringing in!

It is Psi Division's task to do what the regular Judges cannot: deal with supernatural phenomena and hunt mutant psychics down! Its ranks are comprised of powerful telepaths and psychics, able to scan minds and psychometrically "read" bodies and crime scenes. Foremost in this elite cadrÈ is Psi-Judge Cassandra Anderson: sassy, dedicated and hard as nails. Psi-flashes enable her to sense danger and near-future events and she can even read the minds of the recently deceased. In the fractious, urban nightmare of the future, she'll need all her talent and tenacity not just to uphold the Law, but to stay alive!

ANDERSON PSI DIVISION

RED SHADOWS

Mitchel Scanlon

PROLOGUE

A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL FOR MARTIN GRIGGS

Martin Griggs had been to Hondo City a dozen times before, yet the sheer quantity of traffic in the air never ceased to amaze him. Sitting in the passenger compartment of a hover cab as it made its way through the crowded airspace over the city, Griggs looked out of the window at the night skies around him and wondered how the entire city did not simply grind to a halt. The airways set aside for travel inside the city limits were full to overflowing.

There were vehicles everywhere: hover cars and buses ferrying shoppers to and from their destinations; daredevil juves flitting through the surrounding traffic on power boards; even the occasional brave or desperate soul who had resorted to a jet pack to avoid the sluggish roadways of the city below. In places like Brit-Cit or Mega City One, to have so much traffic in the air at once would have been a recipe for disaster; the skies would have rained dark with falling debris from a thousand shunts and fender benders, not to mention blood and bodies as disgruntled commuters turned to violence to ease their frustrations.

In Hondo however, things moved at a more controlled and sedate pace. Rather than jostling angrily for position, drivers politely gave way to their fellows. Watching it, Griggs briefly wondered whether it was a sign that the people of Hondo were possessed of some innate sense of order. Equally though, he realised there could be other explanations. Given the city's reputation for technological excellence, it was possible that the vehicles around him were equipped with advanced computerised safety protocols that their counterparts elsewhere in the world lacked. In the end, Martin Griggs could not be sure either way.

"This is your first time in Hondo City?" the cab's robot driver asked. Having received its instructions in English from Griggs when he had hailed it at the hoverport, the robo-cabbie used the same language.

"My second time," Griggs lied. "I had a short stop-over in Hondo a few years back on business, and I've been promising myself a proper visit to the city ever since. I'm here as a tourist; on vacation."

"A tourist?" The robot paused, before switching its conversational sub-routines to one more in line with its passenger's answers. "There are many

interesting sights to see and places for the tourist to visit in Hondo City. I am equipped with up-to-date information on the city's ten thousand most popular tourist attractions. If you would care to make a selection I could..."

"No," Griggs replied. "That won't be necessary. I have an itinerary already." He did not elaborate.

"As you wish." Quickly, the robot switched sub-routines once more. "If you should change your mind however, you can access the same data at the public information kiosks found on every block. Simply type the numbers 'four-four-four-four' into the keypad and press the red button to be connected to the appropriate database. This service is free of charge." Abruptly, the robot's voice changed tone as it segued to a pre-recorded message. "This is a paid announcement from the Hondo City Tourist Board, a division of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Motto: here in Hondo City we believe it is an honour to ensure a visitor's stay is a pleasant one."

"I'm sure it will be," Griggs said. Then, remembering he was supposed to be playing the part of a tourist on the brink of experiencing the holiday of a lifetime, he gazed out of the window at the neon brightness of the city below them and let his words repeat themselves in a wistful yet excited echo.

"Yes, I'm sure it will be."

The assignment had begun in the usual way. Griggs had been in his apartment in Mega-City One when he had received an incoming encrypted message on the secure line he used for business, the face and voice of the caller on the other end of the vid-phone digitally masked to prevent recognition. The caller had offered him one hundred thousand credits to go to a storage place downtown, pick up a package, and smuggle it to Hondo City on an ordinary commercial flight. No questions asked. The caller had been particularly insistent on that last point. No questions asked. As far as Griggs was concerned it went without saying. If his career as a courier specialising in covert transportations for high-end clients had taught him anything, it was that nobody liked a man who asked too many questions. Besides which, in business as in life, a hundred thousand credits bought a lot of discretion.

Six hours later and, having caught a hi-speed strato-cruiser to Hondo and then a cab at the hoverport, Griggs was walking the busy pedways of the city's New Shinjuku district en route to a pre-arranged meeting with his

contact. He had the package with him, hidden inside a Tri-D recorder held on a strap over his arm. So far everything had gone smoothly. Courtesy of a set of fake documents belonging to one of the dozen different false identities he maintained, he had cleared Customs Control at the hoverport without any problems.

The Hondo Judge behind the customs desk had barely even glanced at him. According to his electronic passport he was Martin O'Reilly the tourist, not Martin Griggs the courier. Granted, if they had insisted on checking his DNA and comparing it to their database of wanted felons he might have been in trouble. The last time he had worked Hondo, two years ago, Griggs had been forced to fight his way clear after a drop had gone badly. To the best of his knowledge there was still an unresolved murder charge hanging over the head of Martin Sikorski, the identity he had been using back then. Never mind the small matter of an open Yakuza contract on his life. A payoff of one hundred thousand credits made it worth his while to take the chance in coming back to Hondo. DNA notwithstanding, it was hardly likely anyone could recognise Martin O'Reilly was the same man as Martin Sikorski. Not when Griggs had changed his face three times in the intervening years.

His face. As ever when his thoughts turned towards it, Griggs's hand strayed unconsciously to run his fingers along the line of his jaw. Ever since his last face-job, the skin there had started to feel loose and slack as though he was wearing a mask. The quack, black market doctor he was forced to use had called it "an unavoidable side-effect" - a man couldn't undergo as many treatments in the face-changing machine as Griggs had without experiencing some degree of degradation in the elasticity of the skin. All the same, as side-effects went, it was hardly the worst. After more than two-dozen face-changes, when Griggs looked in the mirror now he found it difficult to remember what his first face - his *real* face - had looked like. It was unfortunate, but in an era of all-pervasive surveillance with cameras on every street corner, a man who transported illicit merchandise for a living could run the risk of wearing the same face for too long. Ultimately, no longer being able to remember the face he had been born with was simply part of the price of doing business.

"You would like to burn a yellow paper?"

As Griggs made his way through the crowds thronging the pedway, a wizened old man in the saffron-coloured robes of a Buddhist monk stepped

forward to block his path. The monk had a half-dozen strips of yellow paper in one hand and a calligraphy brush dipped in red ink in the other.

"We write your sins on the paper and burn it," the old man said, smiling. "Then, you make an offering to the gods and they will forgive you. Twenty credits. Very cheap. Twenty credits and all your sins will be gone."

Ignoring him, Griggs continued walking, leaving the old monk to try and sell absolution to the next tourist behind him. New Shinjuku was packed with such people: monks and nuns of a dozen different denominations hawked forgiveness and elicited donations with the same fervour as the army of secular street-traders shouting their wares from the stalls lining the pedway. Plasteen kabuki masks, embroidered synthi-silk banners, devotional figurines dedicated to Buddha, Amaterasu, Elvis Presley and a hundred other saints and deities besides. This part of New Shinjuku was the centre of the city's tourist trade - a swirling cacophony of colours, products and voices, all intent on attracting the attention of the passing buyer. In keeping with his cover as a tourist, once Griggs had met his contact at the drop-point and completed the handover, he would return to browse among the stalls and see if he could find a suitable souvenir among the acres of exotic tat on offer. For now, the shopping could wait. First, he needed to make his meeting with the contact and deliver the package to him.

Glancing briefly down at the lightweight Tri-D recorder under his arm, Griggs was forced to concede that his anonymous employer knew his business. The recorder had been waiting for him in the rented storage locker in Mega City One where he had made the pick-up. It was a common enough brand of recorder from the cheap end of the market; exactly the right thing for a tourist on a budget to be carrying, and of such limited intrinsic value that not even the most desperate snatch-thief would consider stealing it. The recorder fit Griggs's cover like a glove, while hidden inside it was the "package" he had been hired to transport - an encrypted crystalline data-slug, disguised to look like a blank slug for recording pictures. Griggs had no idea what was on it. It could be anything: industrial espionage, blackmail material, stolen state secrets. Frankly, whatever was on the slug, it was none of his business. All that mattered was that someone valued it highly enough to pay him a hundred thousand credits to transport it halfway across the world.

Leaving the pedway at the next juncture, Griggs turned onto a broad plaza ringed by gaudy neon shop fronts and made his way through the

bustling crowds to the location where he was due to rendezvous with his contact. "Lucky Golden Eight Noodle Bar", the sign above the doorway read in Japanese and English. Stepping through the automatic doors as they opened, Griggs saw a robo-waiter glide sleekly towards him on castors, its outer metal skin painted in patterns of black and white to resemble a dinner jacket and black tie as though it was the maître d' at some swank Euro-City restaurant.

"Konichi-wa," the robo-waiter said. Then, when Griggs shrugged in incomprehension, it began again. "English? Deutsch? Francais? What is your language preference? Was ist Ihre..."

"English," Griggs replied. "I have a reservation. A corner booth in the name of O'Reilly."

"This way, please." Rotating the top section of its body one hundred and eighty degrees, the robo-waiter turned to lead him past the diners seated at the counter and communal tables to a secluded booth at the rear of the dining area. "Please be seated. Would you care to look at our specials before you order?"

Abruptly, the lapels of the dinner jacket design on the robot's chest slid apart, revealing a small vid-screen showing images of a series of tempting dishes.

"Later," Griggs said. "Another party will be joining me shortly, we'll order then. In the meantime, I'll have a synthi-whisky on the rocks. Glen Fujimori. Ten year-old, if you have it."

"Certainly, sir." Rotating its body once more, the robo-waiter rolled swiftly away.

Taking his seat, Griggs made a show of stretching his arms as though he was tired and glad to be off his feet, using it as an opportunity to surreptitiously scan the other customers seated in the diner around him. Appearances could be deceptive of course, but he saw nothing to concern him unduly. The patrons of the Lucky Golden Eight looked like the usual New Shinjuku crowd: a cross-section of tourists and locals, all minding their own business. Above all else, given his past history, he kept his eyes peeled for Yakuza tattoos and hidden wetware. From the look of things he had no reason to worry. The drop-point was clean and uncompromised. All he had to do now was sit back and wait for his contact to arrive, and soon he would be a hundred thousand credits richer than he had been that morning.

It came subtly at first. An idle thought intruded briefly into Griggs's mind; a passing fancy as he sat in the booth, waiting for his contact to arrive at the Lucky Golden Eight.

The information on the data-slug is valuable, the thought said, seeming almost like a voice inside his head. *Why don't you sneak a peek and check it out?*

Naturally, he rejected the idea. Morality might not have figured heavily in his chosen career, but all the same, a man had to maintain something in the way of standards. He was a courier, his discretion bought and paid for by his clients, and, of course, there was the matter of reputation. Griggs had not reached the pinnacle of his profession by being a man readily inclined to violate a client's trust on a whim. No. He had been hired to take the data-slug to Hondo City and hand it to a contact at the Lucky Golden Eight. He would do his job and collect his fee. No matter what was on the data-slug, the idea of looking at the contents did not figure in the equation.

No-one would know, the thought inside him was as smooth as a serpent's song. *You could go to the restroom and look at the slug's contents there. Why don't you do it? Why don't you?*

Again, he resisted. As time went by, the idea slowly became more attractive. Nearly an hour had passed in the noodle bar with no sign of his contact's arrival. Already, the robo-waiter had begun to hover pointedly close to his booth as though to encourage him to order. Soon, he would be asked to either purchase a meal or leave. However, he found himself more concerned that the contact was late. Checking his watch, he felt a nervous tremor in the pit of his stomach. The contact's failure to appear could mean the mission had been compromised. Standard operating procedure said he should abort the meeting now and get in touch with his employer to request further instructions. But with the employer's identity unknown to him, he had no way of initiating communications.

The contact isn't coming. The thought was insistent, insidious. *You can't get in touch with your employer. There's only you and the contents of a data-slug that might well be worth millions. The contract is as good as broken anyway. Look at the data-slug. You know you want to.*

Telling himself he would wait another five minutes, Griggs tried to forestall the decision. Then, when five minutes came and went, he waited another five, and another. Until, slowly, he found himself trying to buy off

the voice inside him with smaller and smaller increments of time. Three minutes. Two minutes. One. Finally, he reached the point where his resistance melted away entirely. The point where what had begun as an idle thought grew into an unstoppable compulsion. No matter that the limited ethics of his profession told him his actions were wrong, he would look at the data-slug and see what secrets were hidden inside it.

You will need privacy, the small voice said inside his head. *Head for the restrooms, find a stall, and then boot up the recorder's software.*

Following the instructions of the voice inside his head, Griggs left his booth and made his way to the men's restroom. Once there, he found a stall with empty cubicles either side of it, locked the door behind him, and sat on the closed lid of the vacuum pan. Then, switching on the recorder, he wondered briefly how he was ever going to find a way to break through the data-slug's protective encryption.

The password is "Oberon", the voice said. *Wait until the options menu appears on the recorder's screen, and then press F8 and type the password into the keypad.*

He obeyed the voice, even as some small, quiet part of his mind questioned how a voice inside his head could possibly know the password to unlock the encryption. But by then he was in the thrall of a curious detachment, as though he was no longer wholly in control of his own actions. Typing in the password, he saw the screen change as an entirely different menu appeared on it. There were a series of headings, each one linked to a different file within the data-slug's main directory.

Open the file marked "Mission Parameters", the voice within him said as, helpless to resist it, he complied with its instructions. *That's it. Now, read the file slowly and carefully. It wouldn't do to let some vital piece of information slip by unnoticed. Not after going to so much trouble...*

There were a great many files on the data-slug. Later, having opened them all, his body numb from having sat reading them for what seemed like hours, Griggs at last stood and unlocked the stall door. His eyes fixed glassily ahead of him like a sleepwalker, he emerged from the restroom with the Tri-D recorder under his arm and made his way towards the exit - only to find his path blocked by the robo-waiter that had led him to his table earlier.

"There is the matter of the bill," the robo-waiter said, an expression close to annoyance passing across its metal features. "One Glen Fujimori on the rocks, plus a consideration for having held a booth for two hours. A gratuity is optional."

Barely listening, Griggs's hand went to his pocket and pulled out a fistful of credits. Dropping them on the floor, he lurched past the robo-waiter as it bent down to collect them, and stumbled through the automatic doors into the cool air of the night outside. The air did nothing to revive him. His limbs hardly seemed to be his own anymore. He moved with a shambling drunken gait as though his legs were being poked and prodded into action from afar. At the same time, a dull haze suffused his mind. Lost within it, he felt strangely unconcerned at the fact that he no longer seemed to be the master of his own body. Instead, he drifted along like a sleepwalker in the midst of a pleasing dream, vaguely aware that the outside force directing him seemed at least to know where it was going.

Heading away from the restaurant towards the pedway, Griggs found himself pausing beside one of the metre-high metal cylinders set at strategic locations across the plaza. As his hands moved of their own volition to pull open the hinged lid at the top, Griggs's eyes dimly registered the embossed instructions written in Japanese and English on the front of the cylinder. "Hondo City Municipal Waste Disintegration Unit," the instructions read. "Place waste inside the unit, make sure the lid is properly sealed, and begin disintegration process by pressing red button. Penalty for improper disposal of waste (first offence): 1,000 credit fine, or one month's imprisonment." Even as he read the instructions, his hands were already completing their work. Helpless to stop them, as though he was watching someone else, Griggs saw himself drop the Tri-D recorder with its encrypted data-slug inside the disintegration unit and close the lid behind it. Appalled, he watched his finger press the red button - a muffled popping noise coming from inside the cylinder, as the disintegrator activated to destroy the recorder and data-slug alike. In the blink of an eye, millions of credits' worth of valuable information was gone.

His legs moving once more, Griggs resumed his journey. He found himself confused: his mind wallowing in a befuddled state of helplessness as he wondered why he had gone against the ethics of his profession, only to then destroy the data-slug before he could profit from his crime. He could find no answer; his own actions were a mystery to him. Rejoining the

pedway, he began to head north, his body working more freely now as though the force guiding him had established a greater degree of control. Ahead of him he soon saw his destination. He was walking towards a zoom station, one of the network of such stations linked together by Hondo's underground system of maglev trains.

Entering the station, Griggs's hand went clumsily to his pocket as he purchased a basic transit day pass from one of the automatic ticket dispensers lining the concourse. Following the throngs of post-rush hour commuters, he headed for the anti-grav chutes leading down to the platforms. Reaching the bottom of the chute, he found the platform crowded with bored travellers waiting patiently to emerge from the tunnel. But even as he took his place at the back of the platform, Griggs realised the unseen force guiding him was not yet satisfied.

His legs moving once more of their own volition, Griggs stepped forward through the milling crowds towards the edge of the platform. As he made his way closer to the edge, he heard a rumbling noise grow louder in the distance as a train sped through the tunnel. Closer, his feet stepped over the red line on the platform floor that marked the minimum safe standing distance. Closer, he felt a warm rush of air hit him, pushed out of the tunnel by the approaching train. Closer still, he took another step, past the edge of the platform, his body pitching forward as the sole of his shoe came down and connected with nothing.

Griggs fell off the platform, landing painfully on his side on the trackless metal bed of the maglev, directly in the path of the onrushing train. The noise was deafening, the rumble of the train hurtling towards him mixed with the screams of the commuters on the platform, and the shrill shriek of screeching brakes as the train's automated safety systems detected his presence. It was too late. Bathed in blinding light, Griggs looked up to stare into the dazzling headlights of the train as it bore down on him out of the tunnel. His mind granted sudden clarity by the imminence of death, his last act was to move his lips to frame a final despairing question, the sound of it drowned out in the roar of the train. Why, he asked? Why did I do this?

The train, though, had no answer.

ONE

SEEING RED

A few weeks later...

The knife was a masterwork of lethal precision. It was everything he could have wanted. Single-edged, with a long, sharp, tungsten alloy blade and a reservoir of liquid mercury concealed in the hilt to add extra weight to every slash and thrust. A Bowie knife, the salesman had called it. "An American classic," the man had said, smiling. "'Course, the damn Judges say you've got to have a permit before you can go buy a knife like this." The man had leant forward, the smile growing quietly sly and conspiratorial, "But I guess we don't have to worry about all that, what with you being a collector."

Standing in the elevator as it rose slowly towards the thirty-second floor of Kitty Genovese Block, William Ganz put his hand inside his coat to feel the reassuring shape of the hidden knife. The walls of the elevator seemed uncomfortably close and claustrophobic - an unwelcome reminder of all the years he had spent confined in rooms of similar dimensions. But with the knife near at hand, William found he had no reason to let the terrors of his past still rule him. He was free now. Free of the institution and its doctors; free of all their medicines, tests and theories. He was free, and so long as he had the knife they would never cage him again.

The sound of a soft metallic chime announced he had reached the requested floor and the elevator doors opened before him. Relieved to have space to breathe in at last, William stepped out into the hallway, his eyes scanning the numbers on the line of apartment doors either side of him as he searched out his destination. Brenda Maddens: Apartment 56-C, thirty-second floor, Kitty Genovese Block. In his mind's eye he could see her name on the list he had memorised as clearly as if he were holding it in his hand. Soon now, he told himself as he felt a sense of anticipation rising darkly within him, soon now. He looked at the numbers of the apartments again. Apartment 56-C must be right around this corner.

"Bad dog! Look at this drokking mess! I thought I told you to wait until we got outside!"

Startled by the sound of a voice ahead of him, as he rounded the corner, William saw a middle-aged man berating a cringing robo-pet as it stood

beside a realistically steaming pile of synthi-shit further down the corridor. The man was angry, his features flushed crimson with exasperation, but as ever what registered more intensely to William were the colours of the man's soul. To William's eyes the robo-pet's owner was surrounded by a hazy cocoon of colours made up of shifting shades of green and brown, shot through with pulsing black lines of anger.

The exact palette of colours varied, but William had always been able to see the same cocoon around every living being. The aura, one of his doctors had called it, before trying to persuade him it was all a figment of his imagination. William preferred to call it by the same name he had given it as a child, back before he had come to understand that other people were not able to see the same things he did. The soulshadow, he had called it then. In the same way a physical object blocked out light and cast a shadow shaped in its outline on the ground beside it, so a person's soul radiated a shimmering envelope of colours that surrounded their body and revealed the outlines of their psyche: the soulshadow. It was as good a name for it as any. Certainly, William had never heard a better one.

"Damn stupid dog," the man muttered quietly, the black lines of his soulshadow pulsing wider as he bent down to clean up after his pet. "I told the wife we should've got one that didn't produce any shit. But no, she had to insist on getting the latest model."

Still complaining to himself, the man did not even glance up as William walked past him. It had always been the same. Ever since his childhood, William had known what it was to be ignored. Unless he did something particularly strange or noteworthy, people hardly noticed him. Even when they did, they seemed to find it difficult to remember what he looked like afterwards. I guess I must have one of those faces, he told himself from time to time. Average, unmemorable, with nothing distinctive about it to make it stand out from the crowd. Deep inside however, he suspected there was a good deal more to it. Sometimes, it was like he was invisible; as though the same gift that allowed him to see the colours of the souls around him had somehow blinded the world to his presence in equal measure.

He had experienced it all the more intensely in the last few days, since his arrival in Mega-City One. At times, walking the pedways of the city and seeing thousands of people pass him by without even one of them pausing to look in his direction, William knew what it was to be a ghost. Not that he felt any great regret at this curious state of affairs, far from it. Given the

nature of the work he had come to do in the city, the fact that its people ignored him could only be to his advantage.

After continuing a short way down the corridor, William waited for a moment as the man with the robo-pet made his way around the corner towards the elevators. Hearing the distant chime of an elevator door opening once the man was out of sight, William turned to resume his search for the apartment of Brenda Maddens. Coming at last to the door he wanted, he looked around to make sure the corridor was empty before ringing the doorbell.

"Who is it?" he heard a woman's voice call out from inside the apartment after a few seconds.

"Synthi-Flora delivery," William said. Staring at the black spyhole in the centre of the door, he wondered whether she was looking at him through it as he spoke. "I got a delivery.flowers and candy for Ms Brenda Maddens in Apartment 56-C."

"A delivery for me?" The voice on the other side of the door was suspicious, distrustful. "Who's it from?"

"There's no name on the card," he said. "It must be from a secret admirer. You'll have to open the door. I need you to sign for it."

For a moment there was a pause. Then, from within the apartment, he heard the sound of locks turning and the rattle of a security chain being pushed into place. An instant later, the door cracked open a few centimetres.

"Pass it through to me." The woman's voice was wary. Craning his neck around to look through the gap between the edge of the door and the doorjamb, William caught a glimpse of the apartment's interior, but found the woman was still hiding unseen behind the door itself.

"The gap's too small," he said. "I told you, it's flowers and candy. If you want it, you'll have to take the chain off the door."

The door closed once more. Then, from inside, he heard the noise of the chain being released as she finally relented. The door opened again, revealing a small, dark-haired woman of perhaps forty years of age. She was attractive in a somewhat nervous way, but for William her good looks went almost unnoticed. Instead, he found himself all but transfixed as he caught sight of the colour of the soulshadow around her. It was a brilliant, vibrant shade of red - so bright he almost had to squint just to look at her. Red. Abruptly he felt a pressure building behind his eyes: a stabbing pain growing stronger inside his head. *Red*. Brenda Maddens was exactly what

he had been told she would be. She was red. So red. She was everything the Grey Man had promised him.

"You said there were flowers?" Agitated, the woman shifted nervously, as though having gone against the received wisdoms of the city by opening her door to a stranger, she now felt naked. "Flowers and candy, you said, from a secret admirer?"

"That's right," he replied. Smiling, he held up his open and empty hands in front of her. "Flowers and candy. Look, you can see them here. You can see them, can't you Brenda? In my hands?" Seeing her nod her head in agreement, he continued. "And you know what goes good with candy? A nice hot cup of synthi-caf. That really would be delicious. You'd like a cup of synthi-caf, wouldn't you Brenda?"

"Synthi-caf would be nice," she said. "Delicious." Still standing in the doorway, as though unsure what to do next, she looked uncertainly into the apartment behind her.

"Yes, it would be," he told her. "And I'd like a cup of synthi-caf as well. You should invite me in and we'll have some synthi-caf together."

"Yes. I should invite you in." Her eyes were glazed and distant, her voice strangely listless. "Would you like to come in for a cup of synthi-caf?" she asked, already turning away from him to head back into the apartment.

"I'm sure that would be lovely," William replied. Following her as she walked from the apartment's hallway towards the kitchen, he closed the door behind them. "But Brenda, before you make the synthi-caf, there's something else..."

Seeing the woman pause, he put his hand to the knife inside his coat. He felt a flutter in his chest, and he knew his hand was shaking. He tried to soothe the excitement within him. Soon now. The red glow of her soulshadow was painful to him, the colour of it sending little jolts of agony coursing through his brain. *Soon now.*

"Turn around, Brenda," he told her. He saw her obey him. As she turned to face him, the red glare around her seemed to grow ever brighter, the killing urge within him becoming stronger and more compelling with it. He felt the blood thundering at his temples, his heart beating wildly in his chest. "Turn around and look at me. Good. Now, lift your chin. That's it, Brenda." He pulled out the knife, the excitement building within him to a climax as he saw a look of dull comprehension dawning slowly in her eyes.

But, even frightened, she did not resist him. "Higher, Brenda, higher. There's a good girl. Just a little bit higher and soon it will all be over..."

He looked and saw the colours of her soul shining from within her. He saw a red light spilling from her body, suffusing her surroundings with a blinding vivid haze.

He saw red. He felt the knife in his hand, the blade cold, sharp and ready.

He saw red. The rest came easy.

"Red!" Ahead down the corridor an old woman was screaming, her hands flailing in front of her like frantic, desperate claws. "Someone help me! I'm blind and all I can see is red!"

A Med-Judge grabbed her, wrestling with the old woman for a second as he administered a shot from the pressure hypo in his hand, before cradling her gently to the floor as the sedative took effect and her body went slack. Moving down the corridor towards them, Psi-Judge Cassandra Anderson paused for a moment to peer over the Med-Judge's shoulder as he pulled out a mediscanner to examine the patient's injuries. There were twin tracks of bloody tears running down the old woman's face, while the whites of her eyes were disturbingly opaque and scarlet.

"Multiple pinpoint haemorrhages in the blood vessels around the orbits of the eyes," the Med-Judge said, glancing up from the mediscanner as he noticed Anderson standing over him. "That's what made her eyes go red. Can't blame her for panicking, but the blindness should only be temporary. Either way, you have to figure she got off easy." With a jerk of his head, he indicated the half-dozen other wounded citizens sitting along the block corridor ahead of them. "So far we've got one confirmed fatality, with a couple of others taken to hospital in a critical condition." He nodded towards the door of an apartment at the end of the hallway. "Crime scene's in there. I warn you though, if you've eaten anything recently you might want to give it a miss."

Nodding towards the Med-Judge by way of acknowledgement, Anderson continued down the corridor towards the apartment. By the watch on her wrist it was 22.47. The graveyard shift was barely three-quarters of an hour old, and already it showed every sign of being another busy night. She had been wrapping up the first case of her shift, finishing the psychic interrogation of a suspected arsonist, when she had heard the call come over her Lawmaster radio. "Psychic incident at Frank Assisi Block," the

controller had said over the airwaves. "Judges on the scene request Psi Division backup. Psi-Judge Anderson, please respond." Fifteen minutes later, having left the arsonist chained to a holding post to await pickup, Anderson was on site at Frank Assisi, having seen an old woman whose terrified, sightless eyes streamed blood like water, wondering exactly what kind of situation she was about to get herself into.

Just another night in the Big Meg, Cass, she told herself. If you wanted a quiet life you shouldn't have let yourself be born with psychic powers.

Passing the group of wounded citizens sitting along one wall of the corridor, Anderson saw they all had blood running from their eyes, ears and noses. For a moment, she wondered whether the high pressure compression wave of an explosion had caused their injuries. Then, she noticed several of them had dark red patches staining their trousers - front and back - as though they were losing blood through every orifice of their bodies. Whatever lay ahead of her inside the apartment, it seemed likely it was going to be more than the aftermath of a simple bombing.

"We thought it was a sign from Grud," a woman said from among the casualties. Sitting at the end of the line, she seemed younger than the rest - perhaps in her mid-thirties, where the other casualties all appeared to be oldsters. She looked up as Anderson passed, holding her hands open before her with the palms cupped upwards, two spreading pools of blood gathering in her hands and slowly dripping to the floor as her palms overflowed.

"A sign from Grud," the woman said again. Gazing into her eyes, Anderson saw she was in shock. "But Father Grigori... he said we were wrong... He said the boy had the Devil in him... The Devil... My poor little Alexei..."

Her voice trailing away, the woman lowered her eyes to stare at the blood welling in her hands, her body rocking back and forth as a low, keening moan escaped her lips. Caught between duty and compassion, Anderson wavered for a moment as she considered trying to comfort the woman. In the end, duty won out. The Med-Judge was here to aid the survivors. She had another job to do. Her business was inside the apartment, with whatever had caused all this havoc.

No time like the present, Cass. As she pushed the apartment door open she saw that the outside of it was plastered with bloody handprints. After this kind of build-up, all we need now are some screaming teenagers and a

psycho-killer in a jetball mask, and we'd have the makings of one of those horror-dramas they show on late nite Tri-D.

Inside, once she had stepped from the hallway into the living room, the apartment resembled a scene from a nightmare. There was blood everywhere: staining the carpet and furnishings, splattered and dripping from the walls. Every visible surface was coated with the same slick patina of blood. Noticing the furniture had been pushed back and stacked against a wall as though to clear a space for a performance, Anderson saw the body of an old man in black robes lying in the centre of the room. Approaching it, she realised it was the body of a priest.

A gold crucifix around his neck, rosary beads on his belt, a thick black beard framing what must once have been a stern and hawkish face. From the style of his robes and accoutrements, she guessed he had belonged to a Christian sect. Eastern Orthodox maybe, she thought as she knelt down beside him. It was clear the priest had been the source of most of the blood now staining the room. His features were chalk-white and shrunken as though there was barely a drop of blood left in him. But while Anderson could see a quantity of blood congealing in the priest's beard, there was no sign of any obvious injury to account for his death - much less the sheer magnitude of the blood splatter around him. It was a mystery.

For all that, given the unsettling grimace frozen into the priest's face, it was readily apparent that he had died an agonising death.

Scenarios played out in her mind, but none were able to explain how the old priest had died. Then, as her eyes scanned the rest of his body, she saw there was something curled around his hand. It was a whip, the lash made from a thin braid of synthi-leather with a series of knots and barbs set along its length. It made a sinister contrast. It was the kind of thing she might expect to see during a raid on an S&M bar, not in the dead hands of priest.

Okay, so let's review what we've got, she thought. A dead priest armed with a whip, with no obvious wounds on his body, in a room covered in blood; so much for trying to read the scene like a Street Judge, this is getting me nowhere. Forget the physical evidence. It's time to dig a little deeper; time to try it the Psi Division way.

Bending forward, she noticed small flecks of fresh blood on the barbs of the whip. Taking her glove off, she stretched out a hand towards it. Here goes nothing...

She opened her mind, letting the thoughts bubbling in her head grow still and silent as she extended her awareness from the physical world of commonplace reality to the more mysterious psychic world co-existing around it. The *psi-flux*, her tutors in Psi Division had called it when, as a child, they had first shown her how to control her powers. Whether they had the ability to read other people's thoughts or move objects with their minds, every psychic unconsciously manipulated the shifting frequencies of the psi-flux in order to use their powers. It was a realm of boundless potential and limitless energy: the source and wellspring of all creation - though even the most gifted psi could only draw on a fraction of its power. Right now, Anderson was less concerned with the infinite possibilities of the psi-flux than she was with finding out what had gone on inside the apartment.

She breathed in a deep draught of air, letting her awareness of the wider physical world fall away from her with a practised ease. In its place, she turned her attention to a series of smaller sensations as she attempted to make contact with the psi-flux. She felt the whip in her hand, the roughness of the synthi-leather at her fingertips, the wetness of the blood. She concentrated on her breathing, feeling the rhythmic expansions and contractions of her ribcage as each breath of air entered and left her body. In and out; deep breaths, counting down toward her destination. Five, Four, Three, Two, One...

Contact.

In an instant, a rush of images and sensations all but overwhelmed her. She saw the priest standing with the whip in his hand, his face sweating; his eyes aflame with righteous fury as he raised the whip and brought it down. *Crack!* The whip rose and fell again. *Crack!* She saw a group of men and women standing in a circle around him, screaming and shouting prayers. Recognising some of the wounded citizens she had seen in the hallway, she realised they were members of the priest's congregation. She saw faces contorted by fear and hatred as they spat and jeered at something lying at their feet. And, in the centre of the circle, she saw the focus of their attention. A young boy, perhaps ten years of age at most, his body naked and shaking, huddled face-down on the floor with his arms up to protect his head, the exposed flesh of his back a brutal patchwork of welts and cuts.

Crack! The whip struck again, droplets of blood dancing in the air as it scourged the boy's back. *Crack!* The boy screamed and begged for mercy. *Crack!* The priest brought the whip down once more.

She saw the scene from a shifting series of perspectives, her point of view switching crazily back and forth from the boy to the priest. Dimly, she realised she was simultaneously reading the mutual psychic residue they had both left on the whip - the emotions and experiences of both victim and aggressor imprinted on an arm's-length piece of synthi-leather. She was the priest, breathing heavily from his exertions, his heart beating madly in his chest, his mind a raw haze of zealous frenzy. She was the boy, trapped in a world given over to pain and madness, agony coursing through him with every fall of the lash. Among the shrieking crowd, standing in a circle around him, he saw the faces of his parents. Help me! He put his hands out to his mother in supplication. Help me, Momma! Face wrinkling in disgust, she shied away from him while, beside her, his father kicked and stamped savagely at his hands.

Crack! His body shook as the whip struck once more. *Crack!* The priest hit him again. The boy looked up at the face of his tormentor. The priest's eyes were wild and staring, his lips moving to mouth incomprehensible words. Seeing the whip rise again, the boy felt a sudden rush of rage building within him. With it came a strange new sensation. A feeling of power; a buzz and crackle inside his head like the sound of rain drizzling on a high-voltage line. The feeling grew stronger.

He looked at the priest more closely, peering past the outer layers of clothing and skin to the simpler patterns hidden beneath them. Instinctively, the boy felt a shift of perceptions.

Abruptly he saw the priest not as a man, but as a latticework of veins and arteries; a blueprint written in red. Barely understanding what it was he was doing, he reached out with his mind to the flowing red patterns in the body of the man standing over him. He felt the beating of the priest's heart, the pounding of his pulse, the thrum and throb of blood moving through him. Still using his mind, the boy reached out and *squeezed*...

The whip faltering in his hand, the priest paused in his labours. For an instant he seemed to grow unsteady on his feet as a shiver ran through his body. Then, while around him his parishioners continued to shout out prayers, the priest began to gag and choke, the skin of his neck becoming pink and distended as a bulge gathered at his throat. The bulge grew larger, the neck turning scarlet and bloated, the skin pushing out like the cheeks of a croaking bullfrog. At last, noticing their leader's distress, the priest's followers fell quiet - watching in appalled silence as the red bulge pushed

its way upwards towards his face. The priest's body began to shake uncontrollably, his eyes widening in horror. Suddenly, a torrent of blood exploded from inside his mouth to spatter those standing near him. There were cries of terror and disbelief. But even as the screams reached a shrill crescendo, the boy had eyes only for the priest. Rapt in concentration, he squeezed hard with his mind as a jetting fountain of blood vomited from the old man's mouth. He squeezed harder, feeling a thrill of exhilaration as the priest fell to his knees, his head lolling back as the blood surged out of him. There was blood everywhere. Blood hit the ceiling and the walls. Blood seeped from the eyes, ears and noses of the people around him. He saw his mother screaming, blood welling in the palms of her hands, and he felt no remorse. Blood; they had hurt him. Blood; he would punish them all. Blood...

"Anderson?"

With a sudden start, Anderson heard a voice behind her. Her mind still filled with images of blood and panic, she looked around her in dumb confusion for a moment. The whip, the thought forced its way into her mind. I was reading the psychic residue on the whip to find out what happened. I must have gone in deeper than I intended. Lost track of the real world...

Finding her hand was clutching the whip, she released it, the last fading echo of the horrors she had seen falling away from her as the contact was broken.

"Anderson?"

She heard the voice again. As she stood up, she found herself face-to-face with a Street Judge standing beside her. His features beneath his helmet seemed familiar. Looking at his badge, she saw his name was Jansen.

"We've met before?" she asked.

"A few years back," the Street Judge nodded. "We worked a case together in Sector 15. A gang of stookie glanders were using a rogue psychic to help get rid of their competition. A pyrokine. He ended up going psycho and turned on his employers."

"I remember," she said. "We had to take him down the hard way." Unpleasant memories briefly flitted through her mind: a burning warehouse, herself and Jansen both injured, helping each other to safety as the building collapsed around them. It had been a close escape for both of

them. She shook her head to clear it. "Long time no see, Jansen. I take it you're the one who called me in?"

"Yeah." He shrugged uneasily. "'Course, I wasn't expecting them to send in somebody so high up the food chain. This is pretty much an open and shut case." He nodded towards the whip lying on the floor. "I saw you doing a psi-scan. Guess you already know what happened here."

"Some of it." The memories of the things she had seen in the scan returned to her: the boy, the priest and the circle of screaming zealots. "It would be better if you told me the whole story from the beginning. It might help me fill in the blanks."

"Sure." Jansen paused for a moment, as though gathering his own thoughts before proceeding. "It started with a routine call from a neighbour complaining about a noise disturbance. When I arrived here, I found the scene like you see it now. Housing records show the apartment as belonging to Yuri and Elena Voysich - husband and wife. They're Sov Bloc dissidents. Came to Mega City One fifteen years ago claiming religious persecution in the old country, and were granted political asylum. They have one child. A son named Alexei. Ten years of age."

"Alexei." Without even realising it she said the name aloud, the sound of it lending reality to the images and sensations she had seen imprinted on the whip. "The boy's psychic?"

"Yeah. Only thing is, apparently nobody realised it. Somehow the boy's potential didn't show up in the usual genetic scans. Either that, or some Tek Judge screwed up." Jansen shrugged tiredly. "It happens. From interviewing the survivors outside, I found out the boy's powers began to manifest about six months back. Instead of the usual poltergeist activity or whatever, it started with him having attacks of unexplained spontaneous bleeding in different parts of his body, his feet, on the side of his torso, his forehead, the palms of his hands. Anybody normal would have taken the kid to the block doc for treatment, but the Voysich family are religious types. They don't believe in modern medicine. Instead, they decided it was a miracle."

"Stigmata," Anderson said quietly, understanding dawning as she remembered the woman with blood pooling in her hands. "The wounds of Christ. They thought it was a sign from Grud."

"That's right." Jansen shook his head in disbelief. "Damn holy rollers. With some of them it's like they don't realise they're living in the modern world. Like they still think it's the twentieth century, back when people used

to burn witches." Beneath the faceplate of his helmet, she saw his expression grow dark. Then, pursing his lips in a sour expression, he began again. "Anyway, things started to go crazy a week or so ago when one of the neighbours died. Apparently, the neighbour was yelling at the kid about playing in the hallways when he suddenly dropped dead of a stroke. After that, the boy's parents decided maybe their kid's powers weren't a miracle after all. They went to a priest." Jansen gestured at the body of the old man lying in the centre of the room. "Who told them their son was possessed. The priest decided to perform an exorcism. That's what the whip was for. They were trying to beat the Devil out of the boy."

"That's what caused all this?" she said. Granted insight by the psi-scan earlier, her words were as much a statement as a question. "They beat the boy and he turned to the only means of protection he had - instinctively using his powers to defend himself."

"Looks like it," Jansen grimaced as he gazed down at the priest's body. "Don't know what the Med-Judge is going to call it when it comes to writing up the autopsy report: death by Psychic Exsanguination, maybe? What about you, Anderson? You ever hear about anything like this before?"

"It's called bio-manipulation," Anderson said. "The boy can use his mind to control the physical processes in the bodies of himself and others. It's a rare talent, but hardly unheard of. There's a theory that says the way our powers choose to manifest themselves is dictated by the unconscious mind. I wonder..."

An idea suddenly occurred to her. She moved over to the other side of the living room where she could see a series of pictures hanging on the wall. Cleaning the worst of the bloody spray from each one in turn, she revealed the images hidden underneath. They made a disturbing collection. The first picture showed an image of Christ's crucifixion painted in a digitally enhanced photo-realistic style, the specifics of his wounds rendered in gruesome and loving detail: the hole where the centurion's spear had pierced his side; the iron nails hammered through his feet and hands; the scourge marks criss-crossing his flesh.

The picture beside it showed a close-up of Christ's face with the crown of thorns biting into his forehead, wet red droplets running down his cheeks like bloody tears. Next to that there was a Tri-D holo-picture of Christ as the Sacred Heart, his hands pulling back his robes to reveal the beating heart exposed inside his chest, like a cutaway illustration in some kind of

hellish textbook on medical anatomy. Incredibly, the picture was animated - the heart pulsing with a hypnotic metronome rhythm. Watching it, Anderson thought of the boy Alexei. The years of his childhood spent in the company of such images while the unknown power inside him grew slowly to maturity. A power nurtured and shaped by his environment while the number of his days were counted, second-by-second, by the beating of an animated heart.

"Anderson?" Having followed her as she went to the wall and cleaned the pictures, Jansen was now looking at her strangely. "You Okay? We seemed to lose you for a minute there."

"I was just thinking." She directed his attention to the images in front of them. "Makes you wonder, doesn't it? They say childhood upbringing can have a big impact on the way the powers of a latent psychic develop. Maybe if he'd been brought up in another family, Alexei's psychic abilities would have come out differently. As it was, he grew up in a family of religious fanatics, surrounded by images of suffering and torment, no doubt being told day after day that blood has a holy and sacred power. Is it any surprise that's what his unconscious mind latched onto as his powers grew to maturity? Blood."

"Hmm, maybe." Jansen shrugged. "I'm just a Street Judge, Anderson. I don't care how the kid ended up being able to do what he did. All I care about is that there's been a crime and somebody has to pay the penalty."

"You don't mean Alexei?" She turned to stare at Jansen. "I told you: the kid was acting in *self-defence*. If he hadn't used his powers, the priest probably would have beaten him to death."

"What about the others?" Jansen asked. "There are survivors outside, bleeding out of every orifice. Grud, when I first got here I thought somebody had set off an Ebola bomb."

"Collateral damage." Now it was Anderson's turn to shrug. "Why do you think Psi-Judges spend so long training at the Academy? Controlling psychic powers can be difficult, especially when you're a frightened ten year-old boy who doesn't understand what's happening to you. Anyway, no pun intended, but you won't see me shedding any tears for the people outside." She looked at Jansen more intently, almost daring him to disagree with her. "His mother, his father, the other survivors, they were all part of it. I don't care if they thought Alexei was possessed. They all stood around, egging the priest on while he beat a child half to death. You talked earlier

about people burning witches? That's exactly what happened here, only with a whip instead of a fire. I realise that, as the first Judge on the scene, sentencing is at your discretion, but, if you want my opinion, I'd throw the book at the whole damn lot of them."

"Duly noted. I was leaning that way already. Just wanted to get a Psi-Judge's perspective before I passed sentence. It's a pretty weighty list of crimes." Holding up his hand, Jansen counted out charges on his fingers, "Torture, Abuse of a Minor, Performing an Illegal Exorcism, Assault with a Weapon Occasioning Grievous Bodily Harm, Failure to Report a Religious Gathering. Plus, a Conspiracy to Commit added to each of the original charges. All in all I'd say that makes it twenty-five years apiece for the ringleaders, with sentences of between ten to fifteen years for the rest of them depending on their complicity. 'Course, that still leaves the problem of what we're going to do with the boy."

"Problem? I don't follow you. We've established he was acting in self-defence. Standard protocol now says he should be taken to Psi Division HQ for assessment."

"That's just it." Turning away from her, Jansen nodded towards a doorway leading off from the living room to elsewhere in the apartment. "The boy's still here. After he killed the priest, he shut himself up in his bedroom. When I tried to talk to him after I got here, I found myself getting a nosebleed. Figured it was the kid getting ready to put the blood whammy on me. 'Course, I could've called in a tac-team to try and take him down with tranqs and stumm gas. Seemed kind of harsh though, doing it that way. Kid's probably traumatised enough as it is. That's why I called for Psi-Judge back-up. I was hoping you could talk him out. I know it's a risk, but..."

"All right," Anderson said, as she moved towards the door he had indicated. "You've sold me." She paused for a moment to cast a last look at the body of the priest in the middle of the blood-stained apartment. "We have to hope that right now, as much as anything else, Alexei is just looking for a shoulder to cry on.

"Otherwise, there could be a lot more blood painting these walls before the night is out."

"Go away!" the boy's voice shouted to her from the other side of the door. "Go away or I'll hurt you like I did the priest. Don't think I can't."

Standing in the hallway outside the door to the boy's bedroom, Anderson felt a sudden tingling at the front of her face and the warmth of a spreading dampness underneath her nose. Putting her hand to it, she saw blood on her fingertips and realised her nose was bleeding. So much for knocking on the door to see if he's willing to come out, she thought. After all that's happened tonight, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised the kid's ready to shoot first and ask questions later. Doesn't matter though; if I'm going to be able to end this thing peacefully, I just have to go in there and hope he's in the mood to be talked down.

Taking a deep breath, her psychic senses alert for any sign of a disturbance in the psi-flux that might warn of another impending attack, she pushed the door open. Finding that the door wasn't locked, she wondered whether it might be a good omen. No matter what the boy might say, if he really just wanted to be left alone, surely he would have locked the door behind himself? A tenuous line of reasoning, perhaps, but, one way or another, she was about to find out whether it was true.

"Go away!" Her eyes adjusting to the shadowy semi-darkness before her as she stepped into the room, Anderson realised the boy's voice seemed to be coming from beneath the bed. "I'll hurt you. Haven't they told you? I'm the Devil. I'm evil. I can kill you just like I killed the priest."

"No, you aren't the Devil, Alexei." Anderson stood just inside the open doorway, careful not to advance further into the room in case the boy felt threatened. She talked calmly and quietly. "You aren't possessed. You aren't a monster. Everything the priest and your parents told you was wrong. They were wrong, Alexei. You're not the Devil. You're psychic."

For a moment, there was silence. As she began to worry that perhaps she had broached the subject too bluntly, the boy finally spoke.

"Father Grigori said there was no such thing as psychics." The boy's voice beneath the bed was terse and wary. "He said psychics were a story made up by the Judges. He said they lied about things like that 'cause they wanted to gather up all the witches and use their powers for themselves."

"Witches?" Remembering Jansen's comments earlier, she slowly came to understand what the boy meant. "Like me, you mean? Father Grigori told you the Psi-Judges were witches?"

"That's right." Still hiding beneath the bed, the boy answered her. "He said you were witches in league with the Devil. That's how come you had your powers. 'The Judges have turned away from the laws of Grud. That's

what he told Momma and Poppa, but he said if we were righteous, we would follow the laws written in the Holy Book. The law that says 'Suffer not a witch to live.'"

"And do you think Father Grigori was right?" Cautiously, Anderson took a step forward into the room, testing the waters. "Do you think he was right to call you evil? Do you think he was right to *beat* you?"

"No!" As the boy shouted, Anderson felt a wave of psychic force surging towards her. Desperately trying to raise her own defences, she wondered if she had made a mistake in confronting the boy so directly. Abruptly, the threat receded, the psychic wave losing its power before it reached her. "He was wrong." The boy's voice became quiet and sorrowful, the words broken up by ragged pauses as he started to cry. "But Momma and Poppa- they let the priest hurt me- they let him beat me..."

"I guess they were frightened, Alexei." Anderson's tone was conciliatory, but inwardly it sickened her to find herself trying to justify his parents actions. But whatever her own feelings, she realised that it was vital to try and make a connection with the boy.

Concentrate on coaxing him out from under the bed, she thought. That's the important thing. Remember, Jansen's outside waiting to call up a tac-team if you don't bring the boy out. It doesn't matter that you think Alexei's parents were a pair of backwater stupes. All that does matter is making sure the situation doesn't get any worse than it already is.

"Your parents were just scared of something they didn't understand," she continued. "And because they were scared, they did some crazy things, but it doesn't change the fact that both your parents and Father Grigori were wrong. There are no witches, Alexei. You're not possessed by the Devil or anything else for that matter. All that is different about you is that you were born with a special talent. You're psychic, Alexei. That's all there is to it."

She paused for a moment, allowing time for her words to sink in. Then, taking another step closer to the bed, she began again.

"I want you to come with me, Alexei," she told him. "I want you to come with me to Psi Division. There are people there who can show you how to use your powers."

"But I know how to use them..." Alexei's voice was low and mournful. "I used them on Father Grigori... and he... You saw what I did... The blood..."

"I know, Alexei." She stood by the bed, waiting. "And I understand how it happened. You were defending yourself, but I know you didn't mean for

everything to get so crazy. Listen to me, I know it all seems really bad now, but, you've got to understand, things don't have to be that way. You have a gift, Alexei, a gift. You just need to learn to control it a little better." She held out her hand. "Come with me, Alexei. Come with me to Psi Division, and I promise you everything will be better. Come with me, and everything will be all right."

There was another pause. Then, amid the sound of rustling bed clothes, the boy emerged from underneath his bed. Standing before her, for a moment he looked at her uncertainly. Until at last, reaching a decision, he stepped forward and put his hand in hers.

"You won't let them hurt me?" the boy asked.

"No, Alexei. I won't let them hurt you," she said, even though inside her the words felt like a lie. "I promise you, no one will ever hurt you again."

TWO

RED HARVEST

"Come with me," she had said to the boy. "Come with me and I promise you everything will be better. Come with me, and everything will be all right."

As Anderson rode her Lawmaster motorcycle along the megway away from Psi Division Headquarters, the words returned to haunt her.

Two hours had passed since her conversation with the frightened boy in his bedroom. Two hours, in which she had taken Alexei to Psi Division and handed him over to a senior Psi-Judge in charge of the psychic examination procedure. Over the next few weeks, Alexei would be subjected to an exhaustive battery of tests designed to discover the full range and magnitude of his powers. Brain scans, genetic screening, psi-tests: over the weeks to come the boy would be poked and prodded while the data gathered would be analysed and collated. Then, once the results were in, the powers-that-be at Psi Division would make their decision.

I just have to hope he makes the cut, Anderson told herself, as she zigzagged her Lawmaster through the late night traffic. I have to hope they decide it's worthwhile to enrol him in the Academy. If they don't, the alternative doesn't bear thinking about.

The psi-cubes; that would be Alexei's fate if the examining Psi-Tutors decided his powers were too wild and untamed ever to be controlled. If they made that decision it would be a life sentence. Alexei would be condemned to spend the rest of his life locked up inside a small windowless cell whose walls were lined with psi-resistant materials, doomed never to be allowed out to breathe free air or even see the sun. To make matters worse, the odds were stacked against Alexei from the very beginning. He was ten years old; five years older than the usual age at which psi-talented cadets were inducted into the Academy. Already, he had learned to use his powers on his own - meaning there was every chance he had picked up bad habits along the way that no amount of repeated instruction would ever be able to rectify. Training the Psi-Judges of the future was a long and expensive process. The Psi-Tutors might decide Alexei's age made him a bad risk, unlikely to make progress no matter how much time they invested in his training.

I have to hope for the best, Anderson thought as she gunned her Lawmaster's engines and sped faster along the megway, her hair whipping wildly in the breeze from the slipstream. Alexei has a rare and unusual psi-talent. I have to hope that's enough to tip the scales in his favour.

The most frustrating thing about it was that Anderson understood the reasons why the system worked the way it did. It was harsh, but she had seen for herself what happened when wild psi-talents raged out of control. From bitter experience she knew there were whole armies of hostile psionic entities existing in the psi-flux - entities capable of using psychics as a gateway to allow them to invade the physical world. In her time she had seen entire cities brought to their knees and almost destroyed by psychic invasion. She had seen innocents killed in their millions, streets running red with blood, bodies littering the megways, all because of psychic powers.

The history of Mega-City One was filled with such incidents: the Necropolis Event, the Judge Child-Mutant Affair, the Dark Judges Incursions. One way or another, Anderson had been involved in all of them. At times it seemed like her own life had been one long, salutary lesson on the dangers of psychic talents and how they could be used for either good or ill. Taken all together, it was enough to convince her - whatever the distaste she felt towards it - that the Justice Department's policy on psychics was not wholly without merit.

But it was one thing to accept the policy in theory, quite another to have been involved with it in practice. Whatever the arguments for or against the policy, she had been forced to lie to a ten year-old boy in order to gain his trust. *Everything will be all right*, she had told him. *I promise you: no one will ever hurt you again.* The way she felt now, she wouldn't have complained if the words had turned to poison on her tongue.

There has to be a better way, she thought. It was an old argument she had had with herself more times than she cared to count. Just because someone is born with psi-talents, it shouldn't mean their only choice is becoming a Psi-Judge or spending the rest of their lives in the psi-cubes. It's the twenty-second century, for Grud's sake! We should have come up with something better by now. No matter what the Law says, there has to be room for some compassion. As ever, try as hard as she might, she could find no answer.

"Control to Anderson." She found herself strangely relieved as the radio on her Lawmaster motorcycle abruptly squawked into life. Where earlier in the night she might have despaired at being called to yet another

emergency, now the prospect of more work seemed a welcome distraction from her thoughts.

"Anderson receiving," she said as she hit the transmit button. "Go ahead, Control. Over."

"Duty board indicates you have completed your current assignment," the controller said over the radio. "Are you available for reassignment? Over."

"Affirmative, Control. What have you got for me?"

"Psi Division backup requested at Kitty Genovese Block. The Street Judge investigating a suspected homicide needs a Psi-Judge to perform a psychometric scan of the crime scene. Can you attend? Over."

"Confirmed, Control. Currently headed westbound on Henry Ford Megway. ETA to Kitty Genovese. Seven minutes. Request a more specific location on suspected homicide. Over."

"Acknowledged, Anderson. Homicide location is reported as thirty-second floor, Apartment 56-C. Victim is female, approximately forty years of age. Will advise of further details as they become available. Over."

"Acknowledged, Control." Hitting the accelerator on her Lawmaster, she cut across lanes and headed for the interchange to change direction. "Tell the Judge on the scene I'm on my way. Anderson over and out."

"Murder in Mega-City One! This is Ralph Matts with Channel 109's *I-Witness News*, bringing you an exclusive report as Judges investigate a killing at Kitty Genovese..."

By the time she had reached Kitty Genovese Block the vultures were out in force. Anderson parked her Lawmaster in the block forecourt, and as she made her way to the front entrance of the building she saw a large crowd of rubberneckers already gathering outside. Among them, standing a little way away from the rest, was a Tri-D news reporter, his face set in a practised and insincere smile as he breathlessly delivered the latest on-the-scene update to the viewing millions via a remote camera drone hovering in the air before him. Neither development - not the crowd nor the reporter - particularly surprised her. In a city where unemployment ran at over eighty seven per cent, people tended to take their excitement wherever they could find it. Granted, the murder of a woman at Kitty Genovese Block would be counted as a tragedy to those who had known or loved her, but to most of the couch potato population of Mega-City One, its only purpose was as entertainment.

"Anderson to Control." Walking into the elevator to begin her ascent to the thirty-second floor, Anderson hit the transmit switch on the radio unit on her belt to contact Sector Control.

"Control receiving, Anderson. Over."

"Just a heads-up, Control. Have arrived at Kitty Genovese and I am on my way to the reported location of the suspected homicide. Thought you'd want to know there's a crowd of citizens gathering outside the building, a few hundred so far, with more arriving by the minute. You might want to detail some extra Judges to handle crowd control. If nothing else, they can keep an eye out for dips and tap gangs working the crowd. Over."

"Understood, Anderson. Be advised all Street Judges are currently tied up with other duties. The Public Surveillance Unit is aware of the situation and monitoring it. Appreciate the heads-up though. Over."

"No problem, Control, just following procedure. Anderson over and out."

Signalling with a metallic chime that she had reached her destination, the elevator doors opened before her. Stepping out into the hallway, Anderson saw the majority of the apartment doors lining the block corridor were open as their residents stood watching for the latest twist in the unexpected drama they found unfolding on their doorsteps. "A Psi-Judge." As she walked down the hallway, she caught the occasional whisper.

"Looks like the Judges have called in the big guns."

"Grud, I think that's Judge Anderson."

"I seen her on the Tri-D." As she passed them by, it occurred to her that there was a certain irony at work here. Despite the fact they shared their city with four hundred million other human beings, many of the citizens of Mega-City One lived in self-imposed isolation - rarely venturing forth from their apartments to socialise with their neighbours. Normally, the tenants of a typical housing block would no more think of hanging around on their doorsteps, gossiping to each other, than they would consider going for an unprotected swim in the toxic waters of the Black Atlantic. It seemed that, twenty-second century or not, human nature had remained largely unchanged. Against all expectation, curiosity was still a powerful enough force in their lives to cause these people to forego their customary alienation and break through the city's social barriers.

Curiosity and *murder*.

"Drokk. What is this place, the Grand Central Zoom Station?"

As Anderson approached Apartment 56-C, she saw a harassed-looking Tek-Judge emerge from inside it.

"A Psi-Judge, huh?" He regarded her with a sour expression. "You'd think if they were sending another Judge to trample all over my crime scene, somebody might've mentioned it to me at least. I'm still working the blood evidence on the carpet in the apartment hallway, so be careful of what you tread on." Jerking a thumb over his shoulder at the apartment behind him, the Tek-Judge began a familiar refrain. "The crime scene's in there. I warn you though-"

"If I've eaten anything recently I might want to give it a miss?" Anderson said. After the tetchy way he had greeted her, she found the startled expression on his face priceless. Evidently, she had guessed his next words correctly. "What? You're surprised I took the words right out of your mouth?" Smiling cheerily at his confusion, she pushed her way past him. "Haven't you heard? I'm psychic. I'd have thought the Psi Division uniform would be a dead giveaway on that one."

Leaving the Tek-Judge grimacing in ill humour behind her, Anderson moved into the apartment. Finding blood spray splashed against a wall halfway along the hallway, and a set of bloody footprints and drag marks on the floor leading to the kitchen, she paused to inspect them. Killer must have struck the first blow here, she thought, and then dragged the victim into the kitchen. Satisfied with her reading of the evidence, she followed the line of footprints towards the kitchen.

Inside, she was forced to concede that the Tek-Judge had been right in trying to warn her as to what lay ahead. As crime scenes went, it was a bad one - worse even than the blood-soaked living room she had seen in Frank Assisi Block earlier in the night. Standing in the doorway of the apartment's cramped kitchen, Anderson found she was staring at the mutilated body of a woman lying spread-eagled on her back on the kitchen table. The woman's throat had been cut open and her blouse torn away, the latter revealing a torso peppered with stab wounds, while her ribs were exposed by a long ragged incision that had peeled back the skin, either side of it from her collar bone to her groin. Like the Assisi crime scene, there was blood everywhere. Though to Anderson's mind, the most gruesome sight of all was the large, round piece of red-brown flesh lying incongruously on the draining board of the sink, beside a haphazardly stacked pile of dirty dishes.

"You're looking at the victim's liver." A Med-Judge stood over the dead woman's body, minutely examining the wounds with a mediscanner. Raising his eyes from his work, he followed the direction of Anderson's gaze as she stared at the draining board. "The killer removed it post-mortem, along with a length of her small intestine. There's a mass of blood and tissue clogging the outflow pipe for the waste disposal unit in the sink. Looks like the killer tried to use it to dispose of the intestine. Could be he was planning on getting rid of the rest of the body in the same way, until the unit became clogged and he was forced to abandon the idea. Of course, strictly speaking, deciding exactly what was in the perp's mind is more your area than mine." Turning to face Anderson, the Med-Judge extended his hand and offered it to her. "The name's Noland. You must be the Psi-Judge they assigned to perform a psychometric scan on the crime scene?"

"Anderson." Looking down at his proffered hand, she saw it was covered in blood. "Not to seem squeamish, but do you mind if we don't shake hands? I don't like to get blood on the uniform unless I absolutely have to."

"What? I... No..." Looking to his own hand for a moment, he shrugged and smiled in embarrassment. "Sorry about that, occupational hazard. I'm on permanent attachment to Forensic Pathology. When you spend as much time as I do delving around inside dead people's guts, it gets so you don't notice the blood any more."

"Yeah, I can see how that could happen." She joined him beside the kitchen table. "When you were talking before, you used the word 'he' to refer to the killer. I take it you think our perp was a man?"

"Well, I can't entirely rule out the possibility the killer was a woman," Noland said. "Given the depth of some of these stab wounds though, and the general level of violence." He indicated some of the dead woman's wounds. "Extensive post-mortem mutilations of this kind are rare in female-on-female killings. Then, there's the matter of the throat wound. She was killed by a single slash wound that severed the right carotid artery and jugular, and still had enough force to cut into the spinal vertebrae. It takes a lot of strength and rage to inflict a blow like that. All of which makes it highly likely we're looking at a male perp." Noticing that Anderson was staring down at the woman's face, he turned towards her. "At least it would have been quick. Once the carotid was severed, the loss of blood to the brain would have caused her to lose consciousness within seconds."

"What else can you tell me?" Anderson asked. The woman's eyes were open and vacant, whatever had once moved them to joy or sadness was lost in the finality of death.

"You want to hear it from me?" Noland asked. He nodded down at the victim. "She was the eyewitness, after all. I thought you'd do the psychometric scan on her first, find it all out straight from the source."

"No. Not yet." Anderson shook her head. "When you read a murder victim the psychic impressions can be confusing, even contradictory. It's better if I hear what you've got, and then do the scan. It'll help put any psychic impressions I see into context."

"Okay. You know your job better than I do." Laying the mediscanner down on the table beside the body, Noland pulled a handheld comp-unit from his belt and switched on the display screen.

"All right then," he said as he checked his notes. "The Tek outside has already taken the victim's fingerprints and a DNA sample. Cross-match with the Justice Department database confirms her identity as the apartment's registered tenant, Brenda Gladys Maddens, DOB: 2nd of March 2084. Forty years of age. Unmarried. No known dependents. No convictions. As I said before, she was killed by a single slash wound to the throat - with the other wounds and mutilations inflicted post-mortem after the killer had dragged her body to the kitchen. From the angle of the wounds, the killer was most likely right-handed. Assuming he inflicted the stab wounds on the victim's body with the same knife he used to cut her throat, I'd say we're talking about a blade somewhere between twenty-five to thirty centimetres in length, and maybe five centimetres wide at its broadest point. The wound characteristics indicate it to be single-edged, though the first few centimetres of the back edge behind the point may have been sharpened as well. My best guess would be it's something like a Bowie Knife, though I could be wrong there, so I wouldn't take it as gospel. I'll know more when I've had the chance to perform a full autopsy back at the morgue."

"Seems like you know plenty already," Anderson said. "You found all that out from a preliminary exam, some fingerprints and a DNA swab?"

"Technology takes most of the credit." As he spoke, Noland reached out his hand to place it on the mediscanner lying on the table. "These new 3000 series mediscanners are a pathologist's dream. X-ray, ultrasound, infra-red, magnetic resonance, bio-chem, genetics. They can perform just about every kind of scan and test you can think of, and the internal comp-unit analyses

the results." His hand sitting proudly on top of the compact shape of the mediscanner, for an instant he looked like a child with a new toy. Then, remembering the serious business before them, he continued. "Anyway, that's pretty much what I've got so far on our perp. Hope it's of some help."

"Yeah, it should be." Her attention still fixed on the victim's body, Anderson said the dead woman's name aloud. "Brenda. Brenda Gladys Maddens." She took a deep breath, turning to look at the Med-Judge for a moment as she pulled off one of her gloves. "All right then. I guess that about covers everything. You might want to give me a bit of room, Noland. It looks like it's time for the main event."

It was just another night. A quiet night in. Her body curled under a blanket on the sofa and a world of entertainment at her fingertips.

"A world of entertainment": that's what the salesman had called it when he'd sold her the new Tri-D set. Restlessly, she used the remote control to search through the channels. Images appeared before her in staccato bursts as she skipped the commercials and skimmed her way from station to station. Channel 25 was showing an all-night marathon of classic Aeroball games from out of the archives. She hated sports. Channel 38 had a game show featuring contestants dressed as sperm, their costumes complete with wriggling tails, desperately trying to find the secret entrance hidden in a giant plasteen egg that would lead them to the ten-million credit jackpot. She switched again. On Channel 56 she saw a vid-clip compilation showing members of the public caught on camera as they did stupid things: endless shots of people tripping, falling, walking into doors, getting their hands caught in drawers. She didn't find them funny. In the Justice Department-approved crime drama on Channel 73, the heroic Judges of Sector House X had just foiled an organ-legging gang whose sneering leader reminded her of the old man who lived in Apartment 52-B down the hall. "There are four hundred million stories in Mega-City One", the voiceover said as they cut to a commercial; if the last one was anything to go by, Brenda didn't want to see the other three hundred and ninety-five-odd million. Channel 96 was showing *Oldsters Say the Dumbest Things*. Channel 115 had *I'm A Celebrity - Irrigate My Colon!* On Channel 189 they were repeating old episodes of the dating show *Putting Out For Prizes*.

It was just another night. A night alone in her apartment, her only companions a selection of diet drinks and no-fat snacks laid out on the table beside her.

Sighing, she continued to flick through the channels. Cookery shows. Makeover shows. Home improvement shows. Reality shows covering everything from the daily life of the city's heaviest fatty, to a wealthy businessman setting a series of demeaning challenges to a group of eager contestants desperate to win his favour. "Is Bryan really going to be willing to clean the toilets in the executive washroom with his tongue in order to get the job at Trumble Construction MegaCorp?" She decided she did not particularly care to find out the answer. Through habit as much as inclination, her finger pressed the channel selector switch again, her eyes barely registering the titles of the programmes as they flickered past her: *When Priests Attack!*, *Mega-City One's Dumbest Perps*, '*Simp My Ride*, '*Juve Box Jury.'*, '*Celebrity Autopsy.'*; a thousand different channels and not a single thing to watch.

It was just another night; a night with no one there to love her; a night for her to be lonely.

Dispirited, she finally settled for the romantic drama playing on Channel 706. It did not have too many surprises. It felt like she had seen the same story a million times before. Boy meets girl. They fall in love. The only problem is he's from Leonardo Di Caprio Block while she's from Clare Danes - two blocks with a bitter history of rivalry. Their parents disapprove of their romance. A Block War looms on the horizon. Inevitably, the boy and the girl find themselves on different sides of the conflict. Matters reach a climax as the Di Caprio blockers launch a sneak attack. One of the girl's brothers is killed. Crying over his body, she vows vengeance. Joining her fellow Danes blockers in an all-out assault on the enemy stronghold, she is transformed from the shy young girl at the start of the drama to an avenging fury. Suddenly, in the midst of the battle, she finds herself fighting hand-to-hand with a Di Caprio blocker wearing a riot helmet. Using a judo throw she learned in self-defence class, she throws her opponent to the ground and closes in to finish him with her knife. But just as she is about to bury the blade in his chest, his helmet falls away to reveal a familiar face.

It is the boy.

Shocked, they stare into each other's eyes for long moments while the music on the soundtrack segues to a love theme. Abruptly, the girl throws away her knife and helps the boy to his feet. Her decision is made. The theme music swells to a crescendo. They kiss - two star-crossed lovers,

reunited in a passionate embrace as the war rages on around them. The message? In the end, love conquers all.

As she watched the end credits roll, her mood darkened. Intentionally or not, the drama's subtext seemed to mock her. She was forty years of age, single, and it had been three years since her last serious relationship. In her experience, love was a myth. And romance? In real life, there was no such thing as romance.

The doorbell rang.

Surprised that someone would come to her apartment unannounced, never mind so late at night, she threw off the blanket and went to answer it. Afraid the visitor might leave before she could get there, she called out as she crossed the floor towards the door.

"Who is it?"

"Synthi-Flora delivery," a male voice called back from the other side of the door. "I got a delivery. Flowers and candy for Ms Brenda Maddens in Apartment 56-C."

"A delivery for me?" Looking through the spyhole in the door, she saw a man in a Synthi-Flora uniform standing in the hallway outside, a large bouquet of synthi-flowers in one hand and a box of mock chocs in the other. All the same, the habits of city life were ingrained deeply enough that she was still suspicious to see a man she had never met, bearing gifts on her doorstep. "Who's it from?"

"There's no name on the card," the delivery man said. "It must be from a secret admirer. You'll have to open the door. I need you to sign for it."

For a moment, she paused uncertainly. Then, the thought of some stranger being moved from afar to make a grand romantic gesture proved too deliciously intriguing. Sliding the security chain into its slot, she opened the door.

"Pass it through to me," she said. But even as the delivery man told her the gap was too small and she would have to open the door wider, she knew she would accede to his request. Her cynicism of earlier was forgotten. Someone had sent her a token of their affection. She wanted it now!

"You said there were flowers?" As she removed the chain and opened the door to him, she saw the delivery man was looking at her strangely. She felt a vague sense of misgiving, a troubling and undefined unease. It was as though, deep inside her, there was a note of warning. As though, despite a

sense of excitement that almost made her feel giddy, something was wrong. "Flowers and candy, you said, from a secret admirer?"

Smiling, he held up the flowers and candy for her to see them. The mock chocs were in a pink, heart-shaped box. The flowers were a bouquet of all her favourite blooms; a dazzling arrangement in delicate shades of red, light blue and purple. While she looked entranced at the gifts before her, she heard him say something about synthi-caf. Abruptly, she realised she was unbearably thirsty. Synthi-caf. That was just what she wanted. Synthi-caf would be nice, delicious. Hardly listening to the delivery man, she looked over her shoulder at the interior of her apartment. For a moment she felt torn. She was standing talking to a delivery man when she could be putting the kettle on in the kitchen. Synthi-caf. She wanted some synthi-caf. Then, the answer to her dilemma occurred to her.

"Would you like to come in for a cup of synthi-caf?" she asked.

With the delivery man following close behind, she turned to head towards the kitchen. She heard him close the apartment door behind her. Quietly, she heard him call her name. He told her there was something he wanted her to do. Puzzled, she turned back towards him and saw a strange and frightening expression come over his face. The unease she had felt earlier returned to her. Something was wrong. The feeling grew stronger, becoming a nameless presentiment of danger.

"Look at me," he said, a previously unnoticed edge of harshness entering his tone. She was frightened. But there was something in his voice, something compelling. Something that made her obey him.

"Good," he said, smiling as he moved closer to her. "Now, lift your chin. That's it, Brenda." The bouquet of flowers and box of candy in his hands were gone, replaced by something that glinted coldly with the metallic gleam of reflected light. She wanted to run, to cry out. But even as the panic grew wild inside her chest, she found she could not resist him.

"Higher, Brenda," he told her. "Higher. There's a good girl. Just a little bit higher and soon it will all be over."

From the corner of her eye she saw the blade lash out. Seeing a spray of blood - her blood - hit the wall, she opened her mouth and tried to scream. But, no matter how hard she tried, the scream would not come...

A scream, she heard a scream...

Opening her eyes, Anderson found herself standing by the kitchen table with her hands laid on Brenda Maddens's head. Breaking the contact, she searched for the source of the scream. Standing in the kitchen around her, she saw a group of Judges staring at her with startled expressions. Noland, the Med-Judge, was the closest. His face registering alarm, he hurried towards her as she realised, to her embarrassment, exactly who had just screamed.

"Anderson? Are you all right?" Noland asked. "You were in the middle of your psi-scan when you suddenly started-"

"Screaming," she said. "I screamed." The sensations of Brenda Maddens's death still clung to her like a shroud: memories of fear and panic, the pain as the knife parted her throat, the horror as the world went black and she realised she was dying. "Believe me, if you were inside somebody's head when they died, you'd-" Finding an uncharacteristically bitter note in her voice, she cut herself off. "I'll be fine. Just give me a minute. Okay?"

Closing her eyes, Anderson took a deep breath as she tried to regain her equilibrium. Reading the last moments of a murder victim's life was one of the hardest things a Psi-Judge ever had to go through. It could be a gruelling experience: the immediacy of the victim's suffering, their terror, the despair, the sense of loss when one was face to face with the utter inescapable finality of death. Was it any wonder Psi-Judges sometimes found it hard to keep a handle on their emotions? What was it Noland had said to her earlier? "When you spend as much time as I do delving around inside dead people's guts, it gets so you don't notice the blood any more." Psi-Judges lacked the luxury of such detachment. They experienced death as a visceral process. Up close and personal. Close enough to see the glint of Death's pearly whites as he claimed his victims. It could be a heavy burden.

In her experience, it was pointless even trying to talk about such things to non-psychics, more so when the non-psychics in question were other Judges. Teks, Med-Judges, Street Judges: the members of the other divisions of Justice Department were simply too well grounded in everyday reality. The Academy of Law trained them to be that way. Their worlds were different. So different, at times it felt to Anderson like there was an unbridgeable gulf between her and the Judges around her.

Not that she fooled herself that her fellow Judges cared much about that divide. In the end, all most Judges expected of a Psi-Judge was for them to

show up, do their psychic mumbo-jumbo, and leave - preferably without causing too much trouble in the meantime. Sometimes it seemed to her that other Judges looked at Psi Division in the same way as a wealthy citizen might regard a badly house-trained pet. Sure, they can do some cute tricks, but do you really want them let loose in the house where they might soil themselves on the living room rug? Either way, most Psi-Judges learned early on that at some level there was a wall of mutual incomprehension between psychics and non-psychics. Whatever burdens came with the job of being a Psi-Judge, the psychic had to bear them alone.

Whew, you sure you're wallowing in enough self-pity there, Cass?

The thought helped Anderson to restore her balance. Having overcome the emotions she had brought back with her after scanning the dead woman's lingering psychic traces, she now felt centred once more.

I mean, what's all this stuff about "gulfs" and "burdens"? Sounds like you're allowing a small thing like experiencing a murder from the victim's perspective to let you get a little bit maudlin.

Opening her eyes again as she returned her attention to the matter at hand, Anderson saw that she and Noland had been joined in the kitchen by the Tek-Judge she had met earlier, as well as a Street Judge she didn't recognise. They were all watching her intently.

Probably waiting to see if the mad psychic woman is going to do something crazy, she thought, amused despite herself. After all, I've already started screaming for no apparent reason. Now, they're probably expecting a big finale like you see from the psychics in the Tri-D movies: my head doing a complete three hundred and sixty degree turn, maybe, or my mouth suddenly vomiting up ectoplasm like synthi-pea soup.

"It's all right, boys," she said, smiling. "No need to worry. You're safe. The soup's off."

Confused, they stared at her in silence. *Well, that one went down like a lead balloon*, she thought. *Talk about losing your audience. I'd better get back to business before they decide I must be speaking in tongues.*

"Never mind." She sighed and shook her head. "The scream you heard was me channelling the victim's pain. She tried to scream after her attacker cut her throat. I didn't realise I was doing it." She shrugged. "It's just something that occasionally happens when you read the psychic traces of a murder. Sometimes, the whole experience can be a little too vivid."

"You're sure you're all right, then?" Beside her, Noland seemed concerned for her welfare, while the Tek and the Street Judge stood quietly looking at her askance, as though they were still expecting another strange or unruly outburst. Nice job, Cass, she told herself. Now you've gone and frightened the locals. At times like these I get to wondering whether I should put more work into my people skills. Then again, we're talking about a Street Judge and a Tek. They probably don't like other people to begin with.

"I'm fine, Noland," she said. Turning to the Street Judge, she addressed him directly. "I take it you must be the primary on the investigation - first Judge on the scene and all that?"

"That's right," he said. He was tall and thin-faced, but with big shoulders and a lean and athletic build. It was hard to guess his age underneath the helmet, but she would have put him at pushing forty: a twenty-year veteran, at least. His manner was terse and brusque, his mind cold and hard. A man shaped by his years on the streets. The name on his badge read "Weller". "I'm the one who called you in." His lips pursed in disapproval, as though what he had seen from her so far was enough to cause him to regret the decision. His tone was business-like, but there was something concealed behind it. Disdain, she thought. We've known each other for all of one minute, and already the guy doesn't like me. "All right, so you've done your psi-scan. What have you got for me?"

"The killer was wearing a Synthi-Flora uniform," Anderson said. "He was carrying a bouquet of synthi-flowers and a heart-shaped box of mock chocs. A delivery from a secret admirer, that's what he told her. That's how he persuaded the victim to open her door to him. Male. White. Medium build. Average height. Brown hair and blue eyes. Age-wise, maybe in his mid-twenties. And I can confirm the doc's theory." She nodded towards Noland. "The weapon was a Bowie knife." She paused. "In some ways, the info I got from the scan was limited. The victim didn't know her killer, and I didn't pick up any psychic traces from the perp himself." She shrugged. "So I guess if you were hoping for his name and address, I'm going to have to disappoint you. I can only tell you what Brenda Maddens saw. That's all I've got. Except..."

She paused again. She thought for a moment about the smile she had seen on the killer's face as he approached Brenda with the knife. The smile

was calm, confident, self-assured; the smile of a man who knew exactly what he was doing.

"It wasn't his first time." Realising she was thinking aloud, she focused on Weller and the others once more as she tried to explain her line of reasoning. "The perp, I mean. Brenda wasn't his first victim. He was way too sure of himself for that. He's killed before. Several times at least, I'd say. It could be, if we look for recent killings with a similar MO, we'll find he's working to some kind of pattern."

There was another pause while the three men in the room digested her words. Then Weller spoke.

"So you're telling me the killer was a delivery man in a uniform, and carrying flowers and a box of candy?"

"I'm telling you he was wearing a uniform," she said. "I couldn't tell you whether he's really a delivery man or not. Could be he got the uniform from a costume shop. Or maybe he used to work for Synthi-Flora and kept the uniform after he left them. Maybe he's even a dab hand with a sewing needle and he knocked one up himself. All I know is that's what the victim saw him wearing."

"Uh-huh." For a moment Weller regarded her coolly. "All right." He began to turn away. "We appreciate your efforts. You can go."

"Uh-huh?" she echoed him. "That's it? That's all you're going to say. Not wanting to seem like I'm looking for your approval here, but it sounds like you don't believe me. Like you think pretty much everything I just told was a complete load of dreck."

"Yeah, well there would be a reason for that." Beneath his helmet, Weller's mouth was tight. "I wasn't going to say anything, Anderson. But since you ask, I know for a fact that most of what you just told me about the perp is wrong. The delivery man, the flowers, the box of candy - it's all wrong, Anderson, all of it. To borrow your own words, it's all "a complete load of dreck".

"And, what's more, I can prove it."

THREE

SHADOWS OF THE CITY

"They put chemicals in the water!" Standing on an upturned crate to the side of Kesey Plaza, the old man roared at the top of his lungs as a small crowd gathered briefly to hear him. A street corner prophet, he raised his arms to shake his fists at the heavens, the words spilling out of him in a confused and angry torrent. "Then they steal our rain! The Judges are in league with the Venusians! They're trying to dehydrate us to control our minds! It's a conspiracy, I tell you!"

Spraying out a mouthful of spittle with every sibilant, the old man's sermon continued. Standing among the knot of listeners, William watched the performance with interest. The old man's soulshadow was a broiling haze in battling shades of sickly yellow and bruised violet, edged with black thundercloud lines of rage. Having seen similar patterns in the past, on those rare occasions when the doctors in the institution had allowed him to mix freely with his fellow inmates, William knew what to expect next. There was a pressure inside the old man building inexorably towards a climax: a storm waiting to happen.

"Move it along! There's nothing to see here!" Turning at the sound of a commanding voice behind him, William saw a young male Judge push his way forward through the crowd. The Judge's soulshadow was different from the old man's. Its colours were cold blue tinged with flecks of brownish amber; stable and unyielding where the shades of the prophet's aura changed colour and squirmed in the air about him with wild abandon. "Move it!" The Judge pulled out his daystick, slapping it against the palm of his hand to show he meant business. "You've all got exactly one minute before I start handing out cube-time for Loitering."

As the crowd began to disperse, the Judge advanced on the old man standing on his makeshift pulpit. As the Judge approached, the movements of the flowing shades of the old man's soulshadow increased in tempo and became more agitated.

"You wanted an audience, Gramps, you should have joined all the other blowhards down at Speakers Square," the Judge told him. "One count of Public Speaking Without a Licence. You just bought yourself sixty days in an iso-cube."

"The cubes?" The black lines of the old man's aura became thick and jagged, pulsing wildly. The storm was about to blow. "You want to lock me away from the rain?"

"Weather Control doesn't have any rain scheduled in this sector for another three days, old man." As the Judge spoke, William saw thin, black fault lines of annoyance appear in his soulshadow like cracks in a block of ice. "Now, get off that crate before I add Creating a Public Obstruction to the list of charges."

"No!" the old man screamed, the colours of his aura flaring to a sudden incandesence. "You won't make me miss the rain! You won't make me drink your drokking chemicals!"

Shrieking, he leapt off the crate with his hands splayed out like claws. Sidestepping the attack easily, the Judge swiftly brought up his daystick to hit the old man in the stomach, and followed it with a second blow to the back of the neck that sent him sprawling to the ground.

"Congratulations, gramps," the Judge said as he pulled a set of handcuffs from his belt and secured his prisoner. "You didn't want to be drinking chemicals in the water? You just got yourself five years for Resisting Arrest, plus a thirty day spell in the psycho-cubes for observation. They got plenty of chemicals in there. They call 'em tranquillisers."

Hauling the dazed old man to his feet, the Judge began to frog march him towards a holding post. Then, his eyes narrowed as he saw William standing nearby, watching him.

"You deaf, citizen?" the Judge glared at him coldly. "Or are you looking for some cube-time as well? You were ordered to move on."

"Oh, I intend to," William replied pleasantly. Inwardly, he found himself vaguely surprised the Judge had even noticed him at all, so few people did. Still, it hardly mattered. He had to be about his business anyway. Mentally, he consulted the next name and address on the list he had memorised. "Though maybe you can help me? I'm looking for Mary Kelly Block?"

"I look like a tour-bot to you?" The Judge's expression hardened, his hand wandering to the daystick he had replaced on his belt. "I ordered you to move."

"Yes, you did." Smiling at the Judge, William concentrated on keeping his voice polite but firm. "But first, I asked you a question. Answer me. Where is Mary Kelly Block?"

For a moment, the Judge stared at him as though dumbfounded. Then, abruptly, he turned to point towards a pedway at the other end of the plaza.

"That way," the Judge said. "You follow the Wagner pedway for about a klick or so, and then take the right turn for Grant Square. Another half a klick after that you'll see Mary Kelly on your left."

"Thank you, Judge." William set off at a brisk walk, heading in the direction the Judge had indicated. Pausing as he reached the pedway, he glanced briefly behind him. The Judge had returned to his duties, dragging the old man to the holding post as though nothing had happened. He had probably forgotten their conversation already.

Good, William thought as he resumed his journey. Inside, he felt a familiar sensation of anticipation rising within him as he followed the Judge's directions to his destination. The same sensation he had felt as he stood at Brenda Maddens's door.

Soon, he told it, soon.

"There was no delivery man," Weller said, his voice stern and confident as he stood facing her in the kitchen. "Nor even anybody dressed like one. After I arrived here and had a chance to inspect the scene, one of the first things I did was check the available surveillance footage. Unfortunately, the cameras inside the block have been offline for the last three days for maintenance, but the exterior cameras covering the block entrances and exits are working fine. I requisitioned the footage and had it sent digitally to PSU for analysis. I told them to concentrate their initial efforts on checking for any visitors to the block who might have had outwardly legitimate reasons for being here - block maintenance crews, repair men, delivery men, that kind of thing. PSU confirms that - aside from ourselves - the only people who have entered this block wearing any kind of uniform within the last six hours are a couple of plumbers who came to fix a broken wet shower on the fifty-third floor. That's it, so much for your phantom delivery man."

"All the same, I know what I saw," Anderson said. "There must be some explanation."

"I'm way ahead of you there," Weller replied. "I had MAC, the Justice Department mainframe, run a background check on the victim. Brenda Maddens was a member of three different Tri-vid rental clubs, with her membership records showing she mostly rented romance movies. Probably

what you scanned from her was a romantic fantasy she half-remembered from some movie she'd seen, spliced together with her memories of the killer. That being the case, the results of your psi-scan are next to useless. There's no way for us to know which parts were true and which were false."

"No," Anderson shook her head. "You forget that I've been doing this a long time. If her psychic impressions were that far off-kilter I would have sensed it. Right now, I can't explain the discrepancy between the surveillance footage and what was in Brenda's head. What I can tell you is that I saw what she saw, or what she believed she saw, at least."

"You see any bouquets of flowers around here?" Weller's tone was sarcastic. "Any petals dropped during the struggle? Do you see any boxes of mock chocs, heart-shaped or otherwise? I'll have PSU run a pattern recognition search to see if surveillance shows anybody entering or leaving the block carrying anything like that, but I won't be hold my breath. What about you, Noland?" Turning, Weller fixed the Med-Judge with a challenging glare. "You find any residue in the blood to indicate our victim was under the influence of hallucinogens or any other kind of psychotropic?"

"Well... Of course, I'll have to wait to get back to the morgue before I can do a full tox-screen." As though embarrassed to find himself caught in the middle of the argument, Noland shifted uneasily. "But no. So far I haven't found anything like that."

"There you go then," Weller said as he turned back towards her. "There's no evidence to suggest the victim was seeing things. This delivery man business was just some lingering fantasy, which either you or the victim got mixed up with what really happened. I hear psi-scans can be unreliable that way. If they weren't, the whole Justice Department would be run by Psi-Judges, and Street Judges like me would be out of a job. Either way, I'm sure your talents are needed elsewhere. Me, I've got a killer to catch."

It was there again. Even as Weller talked, Anderson could feel his disdain for her radiating off of him in bitter, spiteful waves. Abruptly, she sensed his aversion went beyond the vague mistrust some Street Judges occasionally felt towards psychics. This was more than a simple turf war. There was something eating at Weller, something dark and malignant burning deep inside him. It almost felt like hate. For a moment, she was tempted to call him an asshole and tell him to go drokk himself. Granted, such a violation of inter-departmental protocol would probably earn her an

official reprimand, if Weller or either of the other Judges present chose to report it. But it wasn't the risk of censure that stopped her from giving voice to the words straining at her tongue. It was the thought of Brenda Maddens, dying alone, unable to speak or scream, terrified as the blood sprayed from her slashed throat to stain the apartment walls around her. And afterwards, even as her body began to go cold, the killer wasn'tdone with her. Her eyes straying to Brenda's mutilated corpse still lying on the kitchen table nearby, Anderson was reminded of the words of one of her psi-instructors at the Academy. "We aren't like the other Judges," the instructor had told her. "All they care about is whether or not the Law has been broken. It's different when you're a Psi-Judge. Always remember: we speak for those who can no longer speak for themselves. We speak for the dead. We speak for the victim."

We speak for the dead, Anderson told herself. She was not a religious person by nature, but it felt like a prayer. We speak for the victim. And, tonight, that means I speak for Brenda Maddens.

"You needn't worry yourself about where my talents are most needed," she told Weller. "This is the case I was assigned to, and until I hear different from Control or Psi Division..." She paused, letting her words hang in the air for an instant before she finished the sentence.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Colours. He could see colours all around him.

Gazing at the soulshadows of the people around him as he walked down the pedway, it seemed to William that the city was a kaleidoscope in a thousand shifting shades. He saw candy-apple greens and turquoise blues, burnt ambers and sunburst yellows. He saw earthen shades of brown, delicate hues of violet and darkest indigos. The city was a symphony in every colour imaginable. Then, there were the other colours - the colours of the mundane and humdrum physical world: the spectral orange haze of neon lights, the ink blue-black of the sky at night, the silver orb of the moon, the dirty granite grey of the rockcrete floor of the pedway beneath his feet. The contrast with the institution where William had spent the majority of his adult life could not have been more marked.

There, the walls and furnishings had been rendered in a series of limited variations in the same nauseating and oppressive shade of bile green. Now, William was free to walk the streets of a city painted in a broader palette; a

city that seemed to bleed colour from its every sweating pore, a city alive with colour. After all the wasted years of his confinement, all the years spent with his arms held close to his body by straps and buckles, his mouth drooling from the drugs the doctors used to numb his mind, he felt he had finally come home.

Red, he saw red.

His mouth gone suddenly dry, William spotted a glimpse of red amid the glowing sea of souls before him. At first, it seemed little bigger than a pinprick. As it grew larger, he saw it belonged to the aura of a man walking down the pedway towards him. The man was in his thirties, dressed in the current Mega-City fashions: T-shirt, drainpipe trousers, kneepads, sleeveless jacket. He was just a regular citizen out for a nighttime stroll, minding his own business. As the man drew closer, William saw that his soulshadow was a blood-red tone of vermillion, shot through with veins of cinnabar and livid scarlet.

Red, the man was red.

Without him even realising it, William's hand went to the knife hidden inside his coat. His fingers curled around the hilt. The man came nearer, each movement of his legs carrying him another step closer to his destruction. William felt a throbbing pain behind his eyes; a pressure in his head building toward release. His heart beat wildly within his chest. Nearer; the pain in his head was unbearable. Another half-dozen steps and the man would be close enough for William to strike.

Red.

His mind working feverishly, William developed his plan-of-attack. He would let the man pass by him, and then turn to take him unawares. He would grab his hair and pull the head back to expose his throat. Then, a quick movement with the knife and it would all be over.

Red.

No. This time simply killing him would not be enough. The rage within him would not allow it. It had grown stronger, waxing rather than waning every time he took a life.

Red.

He would cut the man's head off.

Red.

He would make him eat his own eyeballs.

Red.

He would hack the limbs from his body.

Red!

He would rip open his torso.

Red!

He would stamp on his entrails.

Red!

He would...

The moment passed. Struggling to maintain control as the man walked past him, William realised he was shaking. He felt a sudden nausea in the pit of his stomach, the pain in his head reduced to a dull ache now that the man was no longer in his line of sight. Fighting the urge to vomit, William gulped deeply at the cold night air. He did not even dare to look over his shoulder to see whether the man was gone. Despite the fact that his initial enthusiasm for the kill had passed, he still had to guard himself against temptation. It would be so easy to turn and follow the man, dogging his steps through the city until the opportunity arose to murder him in some more secluded location. Finding his hand was still gripping the knife, William released it. He was himself once more. He had been tested severely, but he had stayed true to his word. The Grey Man would be proud of him.

The Grey Man.

Briefly, William's thoughts turned to the deal he had made with his benefactor. The Grey Man had kept to his side of their agreement. He had rescued William from the hell of the institution and given him a new life in the wonderful city before him. The Grey Man was his friend, his patron, his saviour. He had changed William's life and delivered him from his torments. And, in return, he had asked for only the smallest of favours.

Velma Sharn: Apartment 15-A; twenty-ninth floor; Mary Kelly Block. He checked the details in his mind again on the list he had memorised.

Yes, the Grey Man had asked him for so very little.

Now, it was time again for William to live up to his end of the bargain.

"We seem to be having some kind of problem with communication," Weller said. Beneath his helmet, his expression drew tighter as he became angry. "Maybe I didn't make myself clear before. As the first Judge on the scene it's up to me to decide who's going to play a part in the investigation. In that role it is my judgement that your help is no longer required. You're

done here, Anderson. You hear me? Your work here is finished. End of story."

As the exchange between them had grown more heated, Anderson had noticed that the Tek-Judge had disappeared to some unseen corner, while Noland had returned quietly to his examination of the dead woman's body, as though trying to find some work that would help keep him out of the line of fire. Meanwhile, she and Weller had been going at it for several minutes - Anderson fighting to control her own temper as she tried to reason with the recalcitrant Street Judge.

"You're not listening to me," she told him. "I'm not trying to horn in on your case or grab any of the credit. All I'm saying is that there are some leads from Brenda Maddens's psi-scan that still need investigating."

"Leads?" Weller grimaced. "You mean like the phantom delivery man with his imaginary cargo of flowers and candy? I've already told you, Anderson - the things you say you saw in your scan contradict the physical evidence. If that's the quality of the leads you're talking about, I'd be better off trying my luck at finding the perp by sticking a pin in a map."

"That wasn't all I saw in the scan," Anderson said. She found speaking to Weller was like talking to a plascrete wall. "I told you, I'm sure Brenda wasn't the killer's first victim. He's killed before."

"So now you want me to base my investigation around something you think you saw in the killer's face during a psychometric scan that's already been proved to be completely unreliable? Stop trying to build this case into more than it already is. There's not a single shred of evidence to suggest we're looking at a multiple murderer here."

"Um... Not wanting to interrupt, much less contradict anyone..." At the sound of a voice behind them, both Anderson and Weller turned to see that the Tek-Judge had returned from his brief disappearance, and was standing facing them in the doorway. Looking at him, for the first time Anderson noticed the Tek-Judge's name imprinted on his badge: Yoakim.

"But I'm afraid there is. Evidence, I mean." He held up a small, transparent evidence bag. "I found sweat residue and some epithelials - skin cells - on the inner edge of the front door. I'm guessing the killer wiped his forehead with his hand, and inadvertently transferred some of it to the door when he left the apartment. When I sent the DNA to MAC for analysis, it came back with positive matches to DNA found at the scenes of three other

homicides, each of which occurred last night in this same sector. It looks like we're dealing with a serial killer here."

The hallway was quiet, deserted. Standing outside the door of one of the apartments lining the corridor, William rang the bell and waited patiently for the ring to be answered.

"Hello?" He heard a voice from the other side of the door after a moment's pause. "Who is it?"

"Synthi-flora delivery," he said. "I have a delivery for Ms Velma Sharn in Apartment 15-A. You'll like it. It's flowers and candy."

FOUR

DEAD RECKONINGS

"Margaret Lena Penrith," Med-Judge Noland said, sliding open a long metal drawer to reveal the body of a woman with a ragged wound across her throat. "Victim was found dead in her apartment. Body temperature and post-mortem lividity put the time of death at between twenty-one hundred and twenty-three hundred hours last night. The cause of death was a single slash wound to the front of her neck, severing the left carotid artery and jugular vein. A number of hairs have been yanked violently from her scalp, indicating the killer attacked from behind and grabbed the hair to pull back her head and make it easier for him to reach the throat. Besides that, there were no other injuries."

"Vincent Wilbur Henk." Leaving the first drawer open behind him, Noland moved to another one. This time the corpse was a man, empty eye sockets staring out of a face that was an unrecognisable mass of welts and bruises. "His body was found in his apartment earlier this afternoon, but temperature and lividity indicate he died sometime between midnight and zero three hundred hours this morning - making him the second victim. The cause of death was the same as Penrith's - a single slash wound to the throat, inflicted by an assailant standing behind the victim. This time the killer gouged out the eyeballs, post-mortem, and jammed them into the victim's mouth. As you can see, there are also extensive blunt trauma injuries to the victim's face, including multiple fractures of the nose and cheekbones - all inflicted post-mortem. From the shape of the contusions, I'd say they were inflicted by repeated blows with a vid-phone handset. The investigating Judge found a vid-phone belonging to the victim at the scene, broken and covered in blood, but I haven't had a chance to do a definite comparison as yet."

"The third victim was Eunice Virginia Bibbs." Noland pulled a third drawer open. The corpse was of a woman, her body hidden by a sheet below the neck. From the uneven contours of the sheet, the body beneath it was in pieces. "Found in her apartment: estimated time of death between zero four hundred and zero six hundred hours this morning. Again, the cause of death was a single slash wound. But this time he cut her throat right to left, severing the *right* carotid artery and jugular - a wound pattern

that indicates he was standing facing her when he struck the fatal blow. Then, after she was dead, he really went to town." His face unflinching, Noland pulled back the sheet to show what was beneath it. "He cut off both her arms post-mortem, and stamped repeatedly on her torso. If you look closely..." He pointed to a series of striated bruises across the woman's body. "You can see the heel marks. He wears walking boots. Size tens. From the lack of wear in the tread patterns, I'd say the boots are new."

They were in the sub-basement morgue beneath Sector House 34. In the wake of Tek-Judge Yoakim's revelation, Anderson and Noland had travelled to the Sector House to see the bodies of the three victims that Brenda Maddens's killer had claimed on the previous night. Weller had returned with them, but rather than join them directly in the morgue he had left to check in with his watch commander. The Street Judge's sudden disappearance had come as no surprise to Anderson. From his behaviour towards her so far, it was clear that he could hardly bear to be in the same room with her. Inwardly, she found the level of Weller's apparently unprovoked resentment towards her to be odd, even troubling, but she had no time to dwell on it at any length.

Right now, gazing down at the three dead bodies before her, she realised she had a much bigger problem to occupy her attention.

"Three victims, all in one night. Then, tonight, he kills Brenda Maddens." She turned to face Noland. "How come nobody recognised the pattern until now?"

"It's a busy sector," Noland replied. "Shootings, stabbings, poisonings - between murders, suicides and accidents we can have anything upwards of two hundred bodies to process in a typical shift. Including me, there are four Med-Judges and half a dozen med-auxiliaries working Pathology at any one time. As bad luck would have it, a different Med-Judge performed the autopsy for each of the victims. And, aside from the fact that each victim was killed by a slash wound to the throat, the killer's MO varied with each killing. One victim he leaves relatively undamaged. With another, he gouges out the eyes. Then, with the third, he cuts off her arms. I don't know what to tell you, Anderson." The Med-Judge shrugged wearily.

Anderson realised he was all but running on empty; exhausted by the unending ranks of cadavers that greeted him every night. "They slipped through the cracks in the system. Until the DNA analysis came back

confirming the same person was present at each of the crime scenes, nobody realised the killings were related at all."

"What about now?" she asked. "Now we know there's a pattern to these killings, what else do their bodies tell you?"

"Well, it's pretty clear the perp is working off some pretty major rage." Noland nodded at the corpses of Vincent Henk and Eunice Bibbs. "Killing them would be one thing, but it's like it isn't enough for him. He hates them so much he finds himself driven to abuse their bodies after they're dead. I'm no Psych-Judge, but I'd say the progression and increasing severity of the mutilations in each case gives us some indicators towards his psychopathology. There's no mutilation of the first victim because at that stage he thinks killing her will be enough to satisfy the rage inside him. It isn't, so after he kills Vincent Henk he mutilates his body. That still isn't enough, so with Eunice Bibbs and Brenda Maddens the savagery of the mutilations becomes more pronounced. It's like he's building to a crescendo, trying to find some way of expressing his hatred for his victims that will allow him to feel cleansed of his rage after the killings. The rage doesn't go away, so he kills again, the mutilations growing worse each time. I mean, I realise this isn't really my area..."

"No, I think you're right. It makes sense," Anderson agreed. "Rage. He must feel it constantly, like something gnawing and burning within him. Still, he can control it well enough to allow him to function normally - on the surface, at least. His social skills aren't impaired. After all, he was able to persuade his victims to open their doors to him. And he was smart enough to get away from each of the murder scenes without getting caught."

"Smarter than that," Noland said. Seeing Anderson looking at him questioningly, he continued, "Eunice Bibbs wore a locket on a gold chain around her neck. The med-auxiliary who prepped her for autopsy found a black fibre caught in the chain and sent it to Forensics for analysis. It turns out the fibre is an electrostatically-charged polymer, manufactured by the Lauper House of Fashion MegaCorp under the brand name Stay Kleen. The electrostatic charge in the fibre is supposed to repel dirt and liquids, preventing the garment it's made of from getting dirty. Anything spills on it and you just wipe it clean. Teks think it probably came from an overcoat."

"He's wearing a coat that can't get dirty?" Anderson thought of the Maddens crime scene; the blood splattered over the kitchen floor and table.

"So that no matter how much blood there is when he kills, none of it sticks to him?"

"Yeah," Noland told her. "Helps explain how he got away from each crime scene so easily, doesn't it? After he kills each victim he just wipes the blood away and goes on to the next one, confident there's not going to be any incriminating stains left on his coat that might get anyone suspicious. Of course, there're still his other clothes and shoes, but, for all we know, they're made of Stay Kleen as well. You have to hand it to this perp. He knows exactly what he's doing."

"He's probably been planning this a long time," Anderson said thoughtfully. "If it is rage that's driving him, then you don't accumulate that much hate by accident. It takes a long time and a lot of suffering. Someone did this to him. Someone inflicted pain on him over a great many years, and now he's looking for payback. He's looking to take the pain he feels inside and inflict it on others. You don't just wake up one day and decide to become a monster. Usually, it begins in childhood. I can't say for certain, but the chances are we'll eventually find out the killer was once an abused child."

"Uh-huh." Raising his hand to rub the back of his neck, Noland seemed suddenly uncomfortable with the direction her thoughts were taking. "I know it will be easier to catch the perp if we can understand what makes him tick. All the same, Anderson, this is a killer we're talking about. It's beginning to sound like you feel sorry for him."

"No." Anderson shook her head. "The majority of abused children don't grow up to become killers. Our perp chose his path. He killed four people, and then mutilated their bodies. Whatever may have happened to him in the past, nothing could justify that. Abused child or not, as an adult he's a monster, and it's my job to catch him before he kills again."

"You think he will?" Noland asked her. "Kill again, I mean?"

"I'm sure of it," Anderson said. "Remember what you said about the perp being driven to kill by rage? I don't see anything here to make me think he's about to stop. Worse than that, I get the feeling he's only just getting started."

Her eyes lowering to stare at the bodies around her, Anderson fell silent. Three bodies, three victims, three different sets of sensations, recorded as psychic impressions in the cold dead cadavers before her. If she wanted to get any closer to catching the perp, she would have to scan them all. One by

one, enduring every iota of pain and horror they had experienced at the hands of their killer. Unbidden, the memories of Brenda Maddens's last moments on Earth returned to her; memories of another human being's fear and desperation, haunting her from beyond the grave.

It could not be helped. She was a Psi-Judge. Having to deal with other people's bad memories was something that just came with the territory.

"There was something else." Noland's voice intruded into her train of thought, "Two things really, both of them a little unusual. You notice the victims all look to be about the same age? I've checked their dates of birth in the records, and all the victims were born in 2084 - the same year as Brenda Maddens."

"You think the killer is choosing them by their birth dates?" Anderson asked him. "You think that's his pattern?"

"Could be," Noland answered, "but the specific birth date is different in each case. Vincent Henk was born in March like the Maddens woman, but the date was the twenty-first of March instead of the second. Eunice Bibbs was born in April; Margaret Penrith in June. I sent their DOBs and other details to the Justice Department mainframe to see whether MAC could spot any common denominators between them in terms of the dates of historical events, religious festivals, the days of the weeks, solstices, number codes, things like that. But MAC came up empty. So far, all the victims seem to have in common is the fact they were all born in the same year."

"Still, it's one hell of a coincidence," Anderson said. "In a city of four hundred million people, the killer manages to pick four victims who were all born in 2084? That doesn't sound random to me."

"I agree. And then, there's the other thing. You remember I told you that with both Eunice Bibbs and Brenda Maddens the killer cut their throats from the front?"

"Sure. What of it?"

"Well, admittedly it's hardly unheard of, but it is an unusual way to kill someone, especially when, as in these cases, the perp used a single blow to kill the victims each time. Usually, if a victim is attacked from the front by a slashing weapon like a knife you'd expect to see defensive wounds where they put up their hands to ward off the blow. Plus, the throat is a relatively small target. That makes it a difficult target to hit - even more so when the victim is capable of movement and can try to dodge the attack, or lower

their chin to protect their throat. And yet, in both cases, the perp hit his victims right on the money. One blow and it was all over. I'd almost suspect he'd managed to immobilise them in some way, except there's no physical evidence to support that theory. Splatter patterns on the blood spray found at each scene show that the victims were all standing and probably conscious when they were attacked. There's no sign of any ligature marks to suggest they'd been bound. The tox-screen came up clear: there were no paralysing agents, mood altering drugs, anaesthetics or anything else of that kind in their bloodstreams. Granted, it might not actually mean anything. It could just be that the killer got lucky both times. Thought I should mention it anyway, just in case it turns out to be important further down the line. You never know."

"Yeah, you never know," she echoed him. Staring down at the bodies, Anderson realised she had reached the point where the Med-Judge could tell her no more. It was up to her now. She was putting off the inevitable. The time had come for her to scan the three bodies before her. It was time to see what they had seen when they died, to experience their pain.

It was time for more bad memories.

Bad memories. To Judge Edward Weller, sometimes it seemed as though they were the only memories he had left. As he walked the corridors of the Sector House after having visited his Watch Commander in his office, he found himself sinking into a dispirited mood as his mind replayed their brief conversation from only minutes earlier.

"Believe me, I sympathise with your position, Weller," watch commander Jessup had told him, nodding sagely from behind his desk. "Nobody likes interference, much less when they are the primary on a case and supposed to be in overall charge of the investigation. But it's a question of priorities and chain of command. What do you think Sector Chief Collins will say if he hears we had a Psi-Judge wanting to help us catch a serial killer and we turned her away? You know what the SC is like: he wants to see cases cleared and perps put in the cubes. Admittedly, I understand that Anderson can be a little unconventional, even difficult at times, but you will just have to make allowances. She is a *Psi-Judge*, after all. Give it time and I'm sure you will find that she's an asset to your investigation. Anyway, it's not like I'm asking you to partner up with her indefinitely, just until the two of you can bring in the perp." Apparently satisfied that the issue had been decided,

the watch commander's eyes had turned to the pile of reports and folders littering his desk. "Now, if that's everything, you'll have to excuse me while I get back to my duties. This paperwork isn't about to pick up a pen and do itself."

With that, the interview had ended. Despite his best efforts, Weller had been stymied. He had hoped that by visiting Jessup he could elicit the watch commander's support in forcing Anderson to keep her nose out of his case. Instead, he now found he was shackled with the Psi-Judge for the foreseeable future. "Just until the two of you can bring in the perp," Jessup had said. Having worked a number of serial killer investigations before, Weller was well aware of the inherent difficulties of reaching a satisfactory outcome in such a case. Serial killers were elusive beasts. Above all else, the lack of rational motive for their crimes often hampered any attempt to track them down.

In his own twenty year career as a Judge, Weller had encountered serial killers who committed murder by reason of prior abuse, religious mania, substance addiction, or simply because they thought some Tri-D chat show host was sending them secret messages in every broadcast ordering them to kill. Granted, Weller might get lucky. Maybe Forensics would turn up something, or the killer would make a mistake. Maybe the perp would pick the wrong victim next time and find a stump gun blast waiting for him when he pulled out his knife. In the meantime, it looked like Weller was going to be on this case for the long haul. It could take weeks, even months. And during every moment of the investigation, he would be forced to work with a psychic beside him.

A psychic; he would have to spend time with a psychic. To Weller, it seemed like the very stuff of his nightmares.

It all started with Necropolis, he thought, his mood growing bleaker as he made his way to the elevators to head for the morgue. I mean, I never exactly relished having to be around psychics. What Street Judge does? If I'm honest with myself though, it was Necropolis that made all the difference. Necropolis changed everything. After Necropolis, things could never be the same again.

Necropolis.

They called it the Necropolis Event. In the blood-splattered annals of the history of Mega-City One, it ranked alongside the Apocalypse War as one of the worst disasters to have ever befallen the city. A group of powerful

other-dimensional psychic entities had seized control of the minds of the city's Judges and had forced them to start murdering the same citizens they were sworn to protect. Weller had been one of the enslaved Judges. His memories of the event were a series of hazy recollections of citizens screaming, as he either killed them or rounded them up to deliver them to his new masters for extermination.

By the time the entities had ultimately been defeated and the Judges finally released from their mental domination, over a million people were dead and the city was in ruins. Ironically, it was Anderson who had played a major part in defeating the entities' plans. But to Weller, it made little difference. She was a psychic, while he was man who, under the influence of psychic powers like hers, had personally played a role in the murder of thousands. It might be unfair, even irrational, but he could no more forgive her for the fact that her powers were psychic in nature than he could forgive himself for his own crimes.

Even now, more than ten years later, the memories of those nights still haunted him. In the aftermath, like most of the Judges involved in the disaster, Weller had been cleared of having to pay the price for what he had done. "You were acting under psychic compulsion," the senior Judge in charge of the review board had told him. "Your mind was not your own. You cannot be held accountable for your actions." Other than ordering him to attend a few sessions of mandatory psychiatric counselling, as far as the Justice Department was concerned that had been the end of the affair.

For Weller though, it could never end.

He dreamed of Necropolis constantly, the sensations of that time granted a clarity and vividness in his dreams that, mercifully, his waking mind could never muster. He dreamed of a woman choking, desperate, her eyes looking at him in uncomprehending horror as his hands closed around her throat. He dreamed of lines of terrified men, women and children being led screaming to destruction. He dreamed of standing in streets littered thick with corpses, his nostrils heavy with the cloying stink of decay, the sky above his head rendered black by the entities' powers as they delivered the entire city into eternal night.

He dreamed of all these things and more, waking in a cold sweat every time he slept. Then, day after day, when he awoke, he put on his uniform and went out into the streets to do his duty, trying all the while to pretend he could one day forgive himself for the things he had done. In his heart he

knew it would never happen. He had innocent blood on his hands. He could not forgive himself for that; his memories of the victims of Necropolis would not let him. While, thanks to the labyrinthine internal politics of the Justice Department, the memories that were his secret shame were now in danger of being discovered.

A man's mind should be his own, he thought, feeling a rising tide of bitterness as the elevator doors opened before him and he stepped between them. He shouldn't have to guard his thoughts every minute, worrying that some telepath might learn all his secrets. As it is though, I'm going to have to be careful. I can't let Anderson see what's in my head. I can't let her see my memories. I can't let her see anything they could use to pronounce me unfit for duty. I can't let them do it. If they did, I'd go crazy. Some days, I swear being a Judge is the only thing that keeps me sane.

The frustrating thing was, he had not wanted to call in a Psi-Judge in the first place. He had simply had no choice. Sector 34 had one of the worst rates for unsolved homicides in the city. Accordingly, Sector Chief Collins had recently issued standing orders that the Street Judges of his sector were to use "every available resource" when preliminary investigation of a murder failed to identify any suspects. It was all about clearance rates and Justice Department targets. Sector Chief Collins was an ambitious man, and he was not about to let the problems of Sector 34 reflect poorly on his record. In this case, that meant that Weller had been all but compelled to call in a Psi-Judge to perform a psychometric scan on the Maddens woman's body. Now, he was stuck with her. Worse, he was stuck with the very real possibility that at any moment his own guilty conscience might betray him.

It did not matter that the review board had cleared him, or that there were hundreds - perhaps even thousands - of other Judges in Mega City One who were in the same position as him. All that mattered was that he had never been able to put Necropolis behind him. If something like that came to the attention of the powers that be, they would act swiftly. Being a Judge in Mega-City One was stressful enough, never mind when you were damaged goods already. They would not take the risk that, his resolve ground down by his nightmares, one day he might crack under the pressure. They would take action. They would invalid him out of the Justice Department immediately, reducing him to civilian status fast enough to make his head spin. And, in the years since Necropolis, it seemed to him that his head had

done enough spinning already. Sometimes, it felt like his whole world had turned on its axis and was doing cartwheels, leaving him hanging on grimly in the hope that one day things might return to normal. He wanted to be able to forget. He wanted to be able to forgive himself. But he was a Judge. To a Judge, forgiveness was like mercy: a strange and alien emotion that did not quite come naturally.

I just have to crack this case as quickly as possible, he told himself. Concentrate on catching the perp so I can get Anderson out of my hair. In the meantime, I just have to hold it together. Above all else, I can't let Anderson know what I'm thinking. I just have to watch my thoughts. I can do it. I've kept this thing to myself for so long. I can keep it inside a little while longer.

His mind made up, Weller extended his hand to press the button for the elevator to take him down to the sub-basement morgue. The elevator doors closed, the narrow confines of the elevator closing in around him like a coffin. With a distant electric hum the elevator began moving.

A man going down.

"I can't even begin to explain it," Anderson said, as she turned to face the three men who had gathered in the morgue to hear the results of the psychometric scans. "I performed a psi-scan on each of the three bodies. In each case, it's clear that the killer gained entrance to the apartment disguised as a delivery man. With Margaret Penrith and Eunice Bibbs he claimed to be from Synthi-Flora with a delivery of flowers and candy, just like with Brenda Maddens. With Vincent Henk he claimed to be from EPS Prize Delivery, come to deliver a brand new state-of-the-art Tri-D player that Henk had won by filling in a shoppers' survey at his local buy-mart. But that's not the weird thing. The weird thing is, with each victim the killer looked completely different. With Vincent Henk he was a short, dumpy guy. With Margaret Penrith he was a tall guy. With Eunice Bibbs he was brown-haired, with Brenda Maddens he was blond. And with each victim his face was different, too. If I didn't know better, I'd say we were looking for four different killers."

"But that's impossible," Tek-Judge Yoakim said. "The DNA-"

"I know." Anderson held up a hand to cut him off. "The DNA says the same man was at all their apartments, and hence he must be the killer.

Either that or this whole thing is the biggest coincidence in the history of Judicial investigation."

"It's not just that," Noland said from beside Yoakim. "It's not only the DNA that points to a single perp. There's the autopsy evidence as well. All the things we talked about: the single slash wound to the throat and the pattern of increasing severity of mutilation on each victim; all the evidence points to one man being responsible for all the killings. Then, there's the knife. I can't conclusively rule out a different weapon, but there are wound characteristics in each killing that suggest the perp used a Bowie knife. It can't all just be a coincidence."

"No, it can't," Anderson told him. "I agree, and that's why I'm at a loss to explain it. But there it is, all the same. I saw four different delivery men in the victims' psychic impressions. Of course, it might just mean I'm going crazy, but, frankly, I was hoping somebody here might be able to offer a better explanation."

"Maybe he's using a face-changing machine?" Yoakim ventured. "We already know the perp is smart enough to wear a coat made from Stay Kleen. And you know what else? It turns out that none of the blocks where he killed his victims had working surveillance cameras inside them. They either weren't equipped with cameras in the first place, or the cameras they did have were offline for maintenance. It could be the perp is picking blocks like that intentionally. But he still has to worry about being recorded on exterior PSU cameras when he's entering and leaving the building, so maybe he uses a face-changer to alter his features after each killing. He's trying to make it harder for us to catch him."

"No, it wouldn't work," Noland shook his head. "One of the reasons face-changers are so heavily regulated is because it's dangerous to over-use them. The perp killed three people over a nine-hour period. If he was changing his face that frequently, all that would be left of it by now would be a puddle of flesh-coloured goo. And anyway, a face-changer wouldn't account for the differences in his height and weight that Anderson saw in her scans."

"What if the perp's carrying a portable holo-unit?" Warming to his subject, Yoakim's voice grew eager. "Some of those new consumer models out of Hondo are small enough for you to fit them in your pocket. I mean, they're pretty pricey and you've got to be careful about interference if you

move too close to anything emitting EM radiation, but that could explain how he changes his appearance."

"It could do," Anderson said as she considered his suggestion. "I don't know though. Holo-units can work fine at a distance, but the illusion doesn't hold up so well when you get in close. Someone can make themselves look taller or shorter, but their arms and legs are still physically the same size. When you're up close, eventually the inconsistencies add up. You start to realise their stride length is wrong, or their arms don't reach as far as they should. Even if you don't realise what's causing it, unconsciously you still know there's something wrong. The perp got really close to his victims, close enough for them to notice the kinds of things I'm talking about, and yet I didn't get any sense of it in the scans. No. It was a good idea, Yoakim, but I just don't think it fits."

Pausing, Anderson considered the matter for a few seconds longer. Then, finally, she sighed.

"All right," she said, glancing at the Tek-Judge. "So maybe we need to look at this thing from a different angle. What about you, Yoakim? Have you got anything for us? Fingerprints? DNA comparisons? Other forensics?"

"Well, despite what I said about the perp trying to make it hard for us to catch him, he doesn't wear gloves," Yoakim said. "I got a bloody handprint on the kitchen table at the Maddens crime scene, as well as a partial thumbprint on the front door that probably belongs to our perp as well. A couple more bloody fingerprints were found at the Bibbs and Henk homicides, but when I ran them through MAC for analysis, I didn't get any hits. It's the same with the perp's DNA. I couldn't find any matches in the Justice Department database. Either the perp is from out of town or he's somehow managed to slip through the system. Guess that explains the lack of gloves."

"Out of town?" For a moment, Anderson cast her mind back to the memories she had experienced during the psychometric scan of each victim. "Now you mention it, there was something in the voices of the delivery men. They all sounded identical. There was a slight accent. I can't quite place it though."

"I can forward the fingerprints and DNA to some of the other city-states and ask them to compare them to their records." Yoakim grimaced. "I wouldn't get your hopes up though. We've got reciprocal arrangements with

some of them, but you know what it's like with Inter-Judicial bureaucracy. It can take an age before the wheels are finally set in motion."

"Do it anyway," she told him. "You never know, we might get lucky. Other than that, it sounds like we're batting zero on all fronts."

"Of course, there could be another explanation for these multiple delivery men of yours, Anderson." Judge Weller had been listening to the conversation in brooding silence, and so far he'd kept his own counsel. Now, at last, he spoke. "Not wanting to harp on with a familiar theme, but how do we know we can even rely on the results of your scans?"

"You'll just have to trust my instincts," she replied. Despite the brief period in which they had been apart, it was clear Weller's ill-defined antagonism towards her had in no way lessened. "I told you before, Weller. I've been doing this a long time. Reading psychic impressions is hardly an exact science, but over time you develop an instinct for what you can rely on and what you can't."

"Uh-huh." From the expression on Weller's face, it was clear her answer had not been well received. "You want us to base our entire investigation on your instincts?" he said with a quiet edge to his voice. "I'll tell you what my instincts say, Anderson. They tell me you're-"

"Control to Anderson!" The radio unit on Anderson's belt buzzed into noisy life, cutting him off.

"Anderson receiving, Control. What is it?"

"Just taken a report of a suspected homicide at Mary Kelly Block in this sector." Control's voice was terse. "Thought you'd want to hear about it right away. The witness who discovered the body claims it's been pretty badly mutilated. Also, the victim's throat has been cut. It's impossible to confirm this for definite right now.

"But, you ask me, it sounds like your killer just struck again."

FIVE

RED MUSEUM

She had hurt him. The Sharn woman had *hurt* him.

Walking away from Mary Kelly Block, William looked down uneasily at the improvised bandage he had wrapped around his left hand shortly before he had exited the woman's apartment. The surface of the bandage was spotted with blood, while the wound in his hand throbbed painfully underneath. The Sharn woman had bitten him. Even now he could hardly believe it. He felt shaken. Not so much at the pain of the injury, as at the fact that it had occurred at all. Vaguely, he wondered whether he should get the wound treated. He had heard human saliva was full of bacteria. He could get an infection. Suddenly he realised that once the Judges discovered Velma Sharn had bitten her attacker they would monitor the city's clinics and hospitals for reports of anyone seeking medical attention for a bite wound. He would need to be careful. He had too much work ahead of him to allow a foolish mistake to undermine it.

A mistake; briefly, he considered whether or not he had made one already. Killing the Sharn woman should have been no more difficult than any of the others. Despite that, it had gone badly. What were the teeth marks in his hand if not proof of that? As he crossed Harris Square, mindful that he needed to swiftly put as much distance between himself and his killing ground as possible, he cast his thoughts back to the events of his latest killing and wondered where things had gone wrong.

At first, it had seemed to be proceeding as smoothly as all the rest. He had rung the woman's doorbell and claimed to be a delivery man. When she had opened the door, he had seen that her soulshadow was red. He had told her the same story that he had told the other women: Synthi-Flora delivery, flowers and candy, a secret admirer. He had only varied his story with Vincent Henk because Henk had been a man. When Velma Sharn had invited him in, he had closed the door and told her to turn and face him. Again, that was something of a recent variation, with Henk and the first one - Penrith - he had slit their throats from behind. He had soon learned that killing them that way left him dissatisfied. He wanted to look into their eyes. He wanted to see the fear there as he struck out with the knife, and they realised their lives were over. Accordingly, with Eunice Bibbs and

Brenda Maddens he had made them stand and face him. Then, he had done the same with Velma Sharn.

"Lift your chin, Velma," he had told her. "Higher. Lift your chin and soon it will all be over." She had obeyed him. He had pulled out the knife. Then, just as everything had seemed to be going to plan, William had lashed out with the knife and Velma Sharn had done something unexpected, something which William was entirely sure he could never have foreseen.

She had flinched.

At the very last moment, she had moved her head. Instead of hitting the neck, his knife had struck the edge of her lowered chin, the blade deflecting off the hard jawbone to rip upwards through her cheek. Blood spurting from her face, the Sharn woman had tried to scream. He had grabbed her, their bodies falling as his feet slipped on the blood on the polished synth-wood floor. Landing on top of her, he had forced his hand into her mouth to stop her from screaming. In response she had bitten down hard on his hand with her teeth. Desperately fighting to try and free herself, her nails had scratched at his face and neck. Ignoring them, relying on his weight to keep her pinned, he had pushed down with the knife in his right hand as he drew it across her throat. In seconds it had all been over. Arterial blood had pumped out across the floor from the wound in her throat, and her hands had quickly ceased their struggles and fallen limp beside her. Her face had grown slack and lifeless. Her teeth had released his hand. Her eyes had become distant, and then empty. Her aura had dimmed, and disappeared. Their struggle had ended. She was dead. He had killed her. He was the victor.

Now, in the aftermath of that victory, William found he was still confused. He had told her to lift her chin. He had told her to keep still. Yet, at the very last moment, she had disobeyed him. She had moved. She had flinched. How could that have happened?

Thinking back, it occurred to him that her soulshadow had been different to the others. Yes, it was red. All those he killed were red. But the Sharn woman's aura had seemed more active somehow, more vibrant. It was almost as though her soulshadow had been more vivid than that of Brenda Maddens, Eunice Bibbs, or any of the others. At the time, when he had seen how bright and intense the colours of her soul were, it had felt as though it was an even greater prize for him to be able to take her life. He wondered whether that same intensity of her aura had also made her more dangerous.

He wondered whether it had given her the power to resist him. Granted, in the end, her resistance had come too late.

Whatever the problems he had encountered along the way, he had managed to kill her just as he had the others. All the same, he realised that in future he would need to be more cautious. The Sharn killing had not gone well. He had almost botched it. He would not care to see that repeated, not when he had so many more reds to kill in this city before his work was done.

Twenty, William thought. I promised the Grey Man I would kill the twenty reds on his list. In his head, he did a quick series of mental calculations. Three last night, then Maddens and the Sharn woman tonight. That makes it five so far. That leaves fifteen, fifteen more reds to kill for the Grey Man. Then, when that is done, I can start killing them for myself. I wonder how many more of them there are in this city? A thousand? Ten thousand? I don't suppose it matters really. If I'm careful and do them one-by-one, eventually I can kill them all. The Judges can't stop me. They think they can. But I'm William Ganz. I'm special. That's why the doctors kept me locked up for all those years, the Grey Man said so. The Judges don't even know who they are dealing with.

Finding himself reassured by the thought, William left Harris Square by the southbound pedway and continued his journey. As he did, he noticed the pain in his hand had not lessened. If anything, it had grown worse. He felt anger flare inside him as he thought of Velma Sharn. Then, just as quickly, he put his anger aside. It was over. He had killed her. Yes, she had injured his hand. Yes, thanks to her, the hand now ached and was all but useless, but he had already resolved the matter to his own satisfaction. To his mind, he had done what was required. No more, no less. Things might not have gone as smoothly as he would have hoped, but he had responded with all due care to the situation. He had reacted properly.

She was a Red. She had hurt him.

Of course, he had *punished* her...

"I... I only wanted to borrow a pickling jar," the woman said. Her hands were shaking. Her face was white with shock and grief. "The block has a Pickling Competition every year and Velma... she got first prize last year... She's really good at it... She said she'd help me with my entry but when I

knocked at her apartment... the door was unlocked and then... when I went inside... I saw... oh grud... I saw..."

Her face dissolving into tears, the woman became incoherent. Leaving Weller to continue trying to question the witness without her, Anderson pushed past them both and headed for the crime scene. Apartment 15-A, the number said on the door. Courtesy of an update from Control as she and the other Judges had made their way to Mary Kelly Block, Anderson knew the apartment was registered to one Velma Miriam Sharn. The Justice Department database had supplied the other details. DOB: Twelfth January, 2084 - making her forty years of age, and born in the same year as the other victims. One previous criminal conviction for two counts of Custodial Interference resulting in a two month suspended sentence. Twice married. Twice divorced. Two children from the second marriage, a girl of twelve and a boy of nine. Thankfully they had been visiting their father when their mother was murdered. Briefly, Anderson wondered what the perp would have done if the kids had been staying with the mother. Would he have chosen another victim, or murdered Velma Sharn and her two children together? Either way, she did not want to risk learning the answer to that question somewhere further down the line. She wanted to catch this monster now, before he killed again.

Ahead of her, the apartment door was open. While she and Weller had paused to interview the witness, Noland and Yoakim had gone in to inspect the scene. It was better that way. By gaining entry to the crime scene before anyone else could inadvertently contaminate it, the chances were higher that the Tek-Judge and Med-Judge might find some crucial evidence that could otherwise be missed. Such was the theory anyway, and right now Anderson needed every bit of help she could get. With five people dead, it was becoming increasingly clear that the perp would keep on killing until they stopped him.

As she moved to the door to gaze into the apartment, she saw Yoakim standing beside the kitchen doorway further inside. He looked pale his features almost as white and drawn as those of the witness in the corridor.

"Be careful what you tread on," he snapped angrily as he saw her in the doorway. He seemed to regret his outburst immediately. Shaking his head, he sighed. "Sorry. I've done a preliminary search of the floor between the front door and the kitchen so you can walk on it without disturbing any evidence. The body is in there." He nodded towards the kitchen. "It's bad,

really bad. He..." For an instant it was as though the words failed him. He shook his head again, more sadly. "There's just no describing it. You have to see it for yourself."

Disturbed by the sudden change in the Tek-Judge's manner, Anderson advanced towards the kitchen. Noticing blood stains and drag marks on the polished synth-wood floor leading to the kitchen, she realised the killer had followed the same pattern as in the Maddens' murder - killing his victim in the hallway, and then dragging her body to the kitchen to begin the mutilations. Then, as she stepped inside the kitchen, she saw what the Tek-Judge had been unable to put into words. It was appalling, disgusting, monstrous...

The woman's body was lying on its back, spread-eagled on the kitchen table. Again, as in the Maddens' case, the killer had cut a long vertical incision across the victim's torso to open her up from the neck to the groin. This time though, he had not restricted himself to simply removing her liver and small intestine. Instead, gazing around her in silent horror, Anderson saw that the killer had removed more than half a dozen of the victim's internal organs and placed them in pickling jars arranged at intervals throughout the kitchen. It was a grisly sight. Spread out on counter tops already awash with gore, they looked like exhibits at some blood-stained and red museum.

"Heart, lungs, spleen, liver." Standing beside the body, Med-Judge Noland pointed at each of the pickling jars in turn as though they were in the midst of some perverse anatomy lesson. "Large intestine, small intestine, kidneys, her uterus. He used a screwdriver and meat hammer to crack open her ribs, then he removed every organ in her body. The incisions he used to remove the organs are pretty slapdash. He's no expert. He's a butcher, rather than a surgeon. All the same, he must have been working on her for an hour at least." He looked at Anderson significantly. "I don't know about you, but I'd say his rage just peaked."

"Tell me something..." Anderson said. Given the many gruesome sights she had seen in her years as a Psi-Judge, she had thought herself inured long ago to any trace of squeamishness. Now, she felt her gorge rising. Doing her best to ignore the sickly-sweet stench of blood, she gulped in deep draughts of air and tried to fight the urge to vomit. "Anything about the perp. The weapons he used... Anything... Anything that might help me when I have to psi-scan this... atrocity."

"He was more methodical this time," Noland said. Well-versed in what the insides of a human body looked like, he seemed detached from the horrors around him. "As I say, he's a butcher, not a surgeon, but when he mutilated the other victims there were always additional wounds accompanying the major mutilations. He gouged out Vincent Henk's eyes, and beat his face in. He cut off Eunice Bibbs' arms, and stamped on her body. With Brenda Maddens there were stab wounds to the torso as well as the central incision. This time, he was more precise... More ordered in his work. There were no extraneous or unnecessary wounds. He performed the incisions needed to remove the organs, and that was that. It's almost as if the more enraged he becomes, the colder he becomes with it."

"What about the weapons?" Anderson asked. Overcoming her initial revulsion at the hellish scene before her, she took a step into the room. "You said he used a meat hammer and a screwdriver? I take it he left them behind, then? If they belonged to the perp, I might be able to lift some of his direct psychic impressions from them."

"They're in the sink," Noland told her. "Bad news on that front though. The hammer and screwdriver both have tags reading 'property of Apartment 15-A'. It looks like they belonged to the victim. I guess it was the same with the pickle jars. The killer must have seen them lying around and felt a sudden burst of inspiration."

"Some kind of inspiration," Anderson said. "I wonder if-" She heard movement behind her, and then a man's voice quietly exhaling in shock and disbelief.

"Holy drokking Mother of Grud..."

It was Weller. Standing in the doorway, he seemed as appalled at the treatment meted out on the victim as Anderson had been. His face recoiled in horror, and the stony façade of the archetypal Street Judge gave way to a reaction that was entirely more human and unguarded. Standing next to him, Anderson saw a sudden image in her mind's eye of a ruined and shadow-haunted street piled high with violated corpses. In that moment, she realised she had inadvertently caught a glimpse into Weller's mind. The shock of seeing Velma Sharn's mutilated body had caused a remembered image deep inside him to drift to the surface. A fragment of memory perhaps, or something he had seen in his nightmares. Given the bloody history of Mega-City One, it was hard to be sure.

"I checked out the witness," Weller said. Regaining control of his emotions, his flint-faced demeanour returned. The image in his mind faded. His tone became businesslike. "She didn't see anyone entering or leaving the apartment or anything else that could help us. I sent her to the block doc for counselling and told her we might want to speak to her again later. After that, I did a quick canvass of the other neighbours either side of the apartment to find out whether anybody saw or heard anything suspicious. One guy heard a scream two hours ago, but didn't do anything about it. Claims he thought somebody must have been playing their Tri-D too loud. I gave him six months for Failing to Report a Crime in Progress and called the Catch Wagon to pick him up. I also checked with the block super and found out that the block doesn't have surveillance cameras inside it. Called PSU and asked them to run the exterior surveillance footage and look for any delivery men entering the block in the last twelve hours. I'm still waiting for them to get back to me on that."

"You did all that in ten minutes?" Anderson lifted an eyebrow.

"Don't like to let the spike-grass grow under my feet," Weller replied. He gestured towards the body of Velma Sharn. "Looks like our boy is getting worse. Either that, or the Sharn woman found a way to really piss him off."

"Could be both," Noland said. Bending forward over the body, he lifted one of Velma Sharn's hands and inspected the fingers. "I can see blood under the fingernails. It looks like she fought her attacker. I'll take swabs and test it for DNA." Taking a small flashlight from his belt, he pulled upon the victim's mouth and shone the light inside it. "Also there's more blood inside the mouth. No sign of any wounds or tears to the mouth itself. I'd say she bit him. If we take a cast of her mouth, we should be able to match it to the wound on the killer if we can find him."

"*When* we find him," Anderson reminded the Med-Judge. She turned towards Weller. "We'll have to get the Justice Department to issue a city-wide advisory to all hospitals and medical facilities ordering them to forward records on any patient who shows up looking for treatment for a bite wound."

"I'll handle it," Weller told her. Whatever recollections had been triggered inside him by the sight of Velma Sharn's body had passed. He was cold and hard again, his manner brusque and businesslike. "I'll also chase up PSU about the surveillance footage and extend the door-to-door canvass to the rest of the apartments on this floor. There's no telling what some block

busybody might have seen that could help us." He paused as he pointed unflinchingly at the mutilated body lying ruined on the table before them.

"In the meantime, I'd say you've got a psi-scan to complete."

SIX

DIVERSIONS, THEORIES & AGENDAS

"There." The doctor's soulshadow was a serene and self-satisfied shade of golden yellow, daubed with occasional patches of calm, unruffled blue. "That should just about do it," he said as he applied a final piece of adhesive tape to hold the dressing in place. "You know, that really is a rather nasty wound. You say you bit yourself?"

"That's right," William said. "I was eating a munce burger at a foodstand and I must not have been concentrating on what I was doing. You know how slippery those burgers can get when they put all the sauces on them. My hand must have just slipped, and I ended up biting it instead of the burger. It was a freak accident."

"A freak accident," the doctor nodded in agreement. His eyes lingered for a moment on the small scratch marks on William's neck. "Your hand slipped. Yes, I can see how that could happen." Pulling a sani-wipe from a nearby dispenser to clean his hands, the doctor turned to the comp-terminal beside his treatment table. "Now, I notice you didn't give your name or medical number to my nurse. If you could just give me a few details so I can update my files..."

"No," William told him. "You don't need my name, or my number. And I want you to delete every record of me and my injury from your files."

"Delete the records?" Turning back to face him, the doctor stared at him blankly, "But if I do that, the Medical Services Department won't pay me for treating you."

"The money doesn't matter," William told him, more forcefully this time. "You became a doctor to help people. You will help me now. You will delete my records and forget I was ever here. If anyone asks, you never treated a bite wound tonight. Do you understand me?"

"Of course." The doctor's eyes glazed over briefly. "I became a doctor to help people. The money doesn't matter." Shaking his head as though to clear it, he returned his attention to the comp-terminal and pressed a button, and the printer beside it came to life and printed out a prescription. The doctor typed something into the keyboard and pressed another button. "There. I've erased your case from the files." Ripping the completed prescription from the printer, he handed it to William. "The sutures I used to close the wound

will dissolve in a couple of weeks or so once the wound has healed. I've prescribed a course of gene-modified viral anti-bacterials to help deal with any lingering infection. There's a pharmacy around the corner. You will be able to fill this there."

"Thank you, doctor," William said, retrieving his overcoat as he stood up. "You've been a great deal of help."

"Think nothing of it," the doctor smiled more broadly. "I'm a doctor. That's what I'm here for." As William opened the door to step from the treatment room into the corridor outside, he heard the doctor call past him to the line of patients waiting tiredly in plasteen chairs all along the hallway.

"Next!"

"You were right," Anderson said afterwards, as she stood alone with Noland in the kitchen, once she had completed the psi-scan on the body of Velma Sharn. "She bit him, and scratched him. He used the same method to gain entrance to the apartment as before. He claimed to be a delivery man. Again, his appearance was different: average height, dirty brown hair, and a face you'd forget about three seconds after seeing it. If Weller is right and the victims are just remembering scenes from movies they've seen, there was no way this guy was the romantic lead. And he had the same hint of an accent. I couldn't swear to it, but I'd almost say it had a transatlantic twang to it, Brit-Cit, maybe? And another thing, earlier, you said it was unusual that he had managed to kill two of the victims with a single slash wound to the throat while they were facing him. It was as though he had immobilised them in some way?"

"It was a theory," the Med-Judge said. "But there's no direct physical evidence to support it. The tox-screens on both Bibbs and Maddens came up clean. Nor were there any ligature marks on the victims to suggest their bodies had been bound in any way."

"Yet, for some reason, they both just stood there watching him when he pulled out the knife." Gazing at the gruesome display of the victim's organs in jars around the kitchen, Anderson suppressed a shudder. "But Velma Sharn didn't. She put up a fight. She injured him, and that made him angry. Angry enough for him to do all this to her body after he'd killed her." She paused as though trying to read some portent around her in the dead woman's entrails.

"Rage," Noland said. "It's what we talked about before. He takes his rage out on the bodies of his victims, and with the Sharn woman, the rage was worse. You said it yourself: she hurt him. That's what provoked him to go so spectacularly over the top this time."

"Yeah, rage. You're right, of course. But..." Sensing the first stirrings of an idea pricking distantly at her mind, Anderson paused again. She could feel a tingling at the back of her scalp as though her intuition was trying to tell her something. It was a sensation she knew of old. Her unconscious mind had made some breakthrough that her conscious mind had not yet become aware of. Sometimes, intuition was a Psi-Judge's most important ally. Falling silent, she waited, hoping the intuition would make itself plain to her. But, as long seconds passed, it became clear that she was waiting in vain. Whatever her unconscious mind was trying to tell her, she would have to fathom out the message on her own.

"I get the feeling there's something else here," she began again. "Something we're missing." In search of inspiration, her eyes roamed around the kitchen: Velma Sharn's body, the blood staining the floor and counter tops, the pickling jars with their obscene collection of human organs. "When I scanned the bodies of Eunice Bibbs and Brenda Maddens, I thought it was fear that had paralysed them, but, thinking about it, there's no way the killer could have expected them to act that way. Yet, each time, he pulled out his knife and cut their throats while they stood facing him. It was like he knew he could do anything he wanted to them, like he knew they wouldn't move. And then, Velma Sharn broke the pattern. Instead of simply allowing him to slash open her throat, she fought back. It must have surprised him. Surprise, maybe that's part of what we're missing. By fighting back, she surprised her killer. She refused to make things easy for him. She didn't do what he wanted. I think that was what made him so angry. It was the fact that she disobeyed him as much as the fact that she hurt him. She was disobedient, and so he punished her."

"Okay." Hearing Anderson fall silent once more, Noland took up the thread of the conversation. "Let's say we accept that. I don't see what difference it makes. We've already established that he mutilates his victims out of rage. At the risk of sounding like a Street Judge, I don't see how the specific motive behind any particular set of mutilations helps us. Maybe he mutilated Velma Sharn because she hurt him, maybe because she disobeyed him. Maybe it was for some completely different reason. It's clear the perp

is seriously disturbed. There may not even be any real logic behind his actions. Ultimately, he's a psycho. For all we know, maybe he hears the pixies whispering to him and he just does what they tell him to do."

"No." Anderson shook her head. "He's disturbed, yes, but he's not dysfunctional. He plans ahead. He buys clothes made from Stay Kleen to make sure there aren't any blood stains on his clothing to give him away. He picks victims who live in blocks without internal surveillance cameras. His social skills are sufficiently polished that he's managed to persuade five people to open their doors to him. No, he may well be psychotic, but that doesn't mean there isn't some kind of logic to his actions. Granted, it is probably not a logic anyone sane might recognise, but it's there all the same. It may well be the biggest clichÈ in the How To Hunt Serial Killers handbook, but I think the only way we're going to catch him is by learning to think like he does."

"Hmm, rather you than me, Anderson." Now, it was Noland's turn to suppress a shiver. "I have to ask the same question again, though. Even if we assume you are right, and the reason that he carved Velma Sharn up so completely is because she disobeyed him, how does that help us?"

"Don't you see? It means he expected her to obey him," Anderson told him. "He thought he could cut Velma Sharn's throat and she would simply stand by and let him do it. Okay, so he was wrong about that, but why would he think he could kill her that way to begin with? You said it yourself, it's a difficult method to pull off. And, sure, so Velma Sharn fought back, but Eunice Bibbs and Brenda Maddens didn't. How could he have known that? How could he have hoped to keep them immobilised without using drugs or bindings? It's almost like he's got some way of controlling them that doesn't leave behind any physical trace of its presence."

Anderson paused once more. The tingling at the back of her scalp had grown more pronounced.

"No physical traces," she said. A theory was slowly forming inside her mind, but as yet she could not see its shape well enough to speak it aloud. "I wonder..."

It had gone well with the doctor. Putting the prescription paper in the pocket of his overcoat, William decided to forego the short walk around the block to the pharmacy that the doctor had mentioned. He would fill the prescription later. In searching for medical treatment for the bite wound in

his hand, William had wasted too much time already. He had visited three clinics in turn, rejecting them one after another because they were each staffed by a robo-doc. At the fourth clinic he had finally achieved his objective, finding a human doctor in attendance. Now, his wound having been treated, it was time for William to return to his work.

Melanie Arnwold, Apartment 26-C, twenty-first floor, Elizabeth Short Block. The names and addresses on the list that the Grey Man had made him memorise, burned inside his mind with undimmed fire.

He was tired, so tired. Stifling a yawn as he crossed another of Mega-City One's innumerable plazas, William realised his endeavours of the night thus far had taken more out of him than he might have expected. After all his time in the institution, he was unused to such exertions. He was unaccustomed to murder, unaccustomed to injury, unaccustomed even to having to walk any great distance. Alone in his cell in the institution for all those years, there had simply been nowhere for him to walk to. His life had been a long drug-addled haze, only granted variation by the colours of the pills they had given him.

Greens and yellows and pinks and blues. The blue ones were the worst. When they had given him the blue pills, he had lost his ability to see the soulshadows of the people around him. It had frightened him: after years spent studying the subtle shades of human auras, it had felt like he had been blinded. He had tried to explain it to the doctors. He had begged and pleaded for them to change his medication. Then, when they would not listen, he had taken the only option left open to him. He had played along with them, pretending they had cured him, doing his best to seem cheerful and well-adjusted, even though his brain felt like jellied munce. Gradually, it had worked. He had gained their trust. The doctors had allowed him out of his cell to attend group therapy and mix with the other inmates of the institution. Until, finally, the day had come when a new and inexperienced doctor had decided he no longer needed to wear the straitjacket. "This is a big day for you, William," the doctor had said to him. "I really feel like you've been making progress." William had smiled and told the doctor he was sure he was right. Then, when they had finally released the straps, he had picked up a chair and beaten the man's brains in.

I never knew what colour his soulshadow was, William thought, remembering the shocked expression on the doctor's face and the blood spurting from his scalp as he had pounded his head with the chair over and

over again. Even now, looking back, I don't know what his colour was. He remembered looking down at the doctor at his feet, even as the attendants had grabbed him, the life in the doctor's eyes slowly dying. William had never particularly liked the man. No matter what William said to him, the doctor had always favoured him with a condescending half-smile as though he was sure he knew better. I bet he was a Red, William thought with satisfaction. And if he was a Red, then he deserved to die.

After that, they had taken him off the blue pills and replaced them with the pink ones. Or was it the yellows? He had been given so many different colours of pills in the institution that it was hard to remember what order they had come in. He realised it no longer mattered. Not tonight. Not now those days were behind him. I'm free now, he reminded himself. Free as a bird. Then he saw something in the sky ahead of him that brought him up short and caused him to pause in his journey.

There were people flying in the air like birds.

For an instant it felt as though the world had been listening to his thoughts and had rearranged itself accordingly. In the distance, he could see the small and fragile shapes of half a dozen human-sized flying figures as they swooped and dived, riding the thermals between two distant city blocks. Bat-gliders; the name came to him finally as he overcame his initial disbelief. Bat-gliders: that was what they were called. Casting his mind back, he remembered seeing a docu-vid about them in the institution during one of the brief periods when the doctors had granted him Tri-D privileges. In a city where hundreds of millions of people lived in perpetual joblessness, it was perhaps not surprising that some of them turned to unusual hobbies to alleviate their boredom.

Outfitted with lo-grav units to prevent them falling to earth, and with two glider wings each, fixed to their arms to guide their flight, bat-gliding was simply yet another of the many strange crazes that flourished among those who lived in Mega-City One. Shaking his head in wonder, it once more occurred to William that the people who lived in the world outside were in many ways far crazier than anyone he had met in the institution. For all that, as he watched the soaring figures of the bat-gliders silhouetted against the lights of the buildings behind them, he quickly found that their hobby had a certain appeal. What he would give right now to be able to fly easily to his destination rather than have to trudge his way towards it step by wearying step.

He yawned again, reluctantly turning his eyes away from the bat-gliders as he resumed his journey. He felt exhausted. Left to his own devices, William might well have decided to call it a night, but the thought of his agreement with the Grey Man spurred him on. There were fifteen names left on the list. Fifteen names, and the terms of their bargain would be completed. If he killed one more tonight, he would be a step closer to completing that bargain.

One more, he told himself. One more Red, and then I can rest. He thought of the list again.

One more, and her name is Melanie Arnwold.

"You want a city-wide advisory on bite wounds?" The voice of the Control dispatcher in his earpiece was strained to the point of exasperation. "Weller, do you realise what you're asking for? If we compile the records on every citizen who shows up at a med-centre looking to get treatment for a bite wound, the report could run to hundreds of pages. This is Mega-City One we're talking about: a city of four hundred million people. The chances are good that probably a couple of thousand of them will get bitten by something or other tonight, and that's not counting the kinks and freaks and weirdoes. At least let me filter out the robo-pet and animal bites. That way the report might come down to manageable proportions."

"No." As he stood in the corridor of Mary Kelly Block talking quietly into his helmet mic, Weller's own voice was firm. "Could be our boy's smart enough to try and pass his injury off as a rat or dog vulture bite. I want the record of every bite wound, no matter what the reported cause of the injury. Also, check with med-bay at the Sector House and find out what drugs would normally be prescribed for treating a human bite. Next, send out an advisory to all pharmacies ordering them to report every sale of those drugs, beginning six hours ago and continuing until further notice. Then, I want the whole lot sent to MAC for analysis."

"You want us to include pharmacies as well?" Control's voice was aghast. "Do you realise how much raw data that's going to generate? I mean, sure MAC can handle it, but it's a case of garbage in, garbage out. If you give MAC that much data without fixing any kind of parameters to the search, you'll end up with a list of possibles that it could take you weeks to trawl through."

"I'm already way ahead of you," Weller told him. "I've asked Gunderson at PSU to analyse the surveillance footage. Once he's finished you can use his data to give you your search parameters, cross-referencing it with the info you get from the advisories to see if MAC can come up with any significant matches."

"All right," Control sighed. "You do realise this is going to take time, though? Even assuming your perp does try to seek out treatment for his wound, there's no guarantee he's going to do it tonight. He could visit the doc tomorrow, or the day after. Hell, for all we know, he may wait until he's got pus leaking from the wound and it's gone gangrenous before he decides to do anything about it. It could take *days*."

"It takes as long as it takes," said Weller. "Oh, and Control, one more thing, if and when you get useable results back from MAC, I want you to make sure you contact me about it first. Nobody else, only me, you understand?"

"You want me to leave Anderson out of the loop?" There was a note of protest. "But she's assigned to the case. Procedure says-"

"Procedure says it's my decision," Weller cut him off. "I was the first Judge on the scene at the Maddens' apartment, and the Maddens' homicide was the case that made it clear we had a serial killer on our hands. Unless the sector chief decides otherwise, that makes me the primary on the entire investigation. Have you had any messages from Sector Chief Collins telling you I'm off the case?"

"No. I-"

"Good. In that case, you'll follow my instructions. You will contact me when you hear back from MAC, and you will leave it to my discretion whether or not to inform Anderson. Are we clear?"

"Crystal. You want to get into a pissing contest with Psi Division, go right ahead. But, if you want my opinion, it sounds like you're digging your own grave."

"If I want your opinion I'll ask for it, Control. Weller over and out."

SEVEN

WILD BLUE YONDER

The sky was waiting for him. As he stepped out through the maintenance exit onto the deserted rooftop of his block, Lenny Kaspasian felt his heart quicken in exhilaration as he paused for a moment to admire the view. It was everything he could have wished for. The moon was round and full, the sky was clear and cloudless. He was standing two hundred storeys up with the night-time landscape of Mega-City One laid out before him like some perfect dream of what a city should look like. During the day you could see all the grime and dust, the cracked plascrete, the angry and restless traffic, the gaudy pastel shades with which the Housing Department insisted on painting its buildings. Come the fall of night though, things were different. Bathed in silver moonlight, the city seemed special. It seemed tranquil, yet somehow more alive. It was as though the dull humdrum world of the day had been transformed by some strange sorcery of the night into a magical kingdom where anything could happen.

I should have done this years ago, Lenny thought, staring at the cityscape as a bubbling excitement grew gently within him. To think, I spent all that time shuffling around in the dirt at ground level with every other poor schmuck when I could have been soaring through the skies. He felt a lump rise at the base of his throat, the beginnings of tears stinging wetly at the corners of his eyes. Tonight, everything changes. Tonight, my life begins a whole new chapter. Tonight, I'm going to fly like an eagle.

"Heh, or like a *bat*, at least." He had said the last words aloud, whispering them quietly to himself in childlike glee. In contrast to the serene stillness of the rooftop, they sounded almost loud enough to be gunshots. On any other night, having inadvertently broken the silence, Lenny might have squirmed in embarrassment as he cast nervous eyes at the shadows around him to make sure there was no one nearby to hear him. Tonight he felt a bigger man than that. He had thrown off the shackles of his usual fears and insecurities, refusing to bend any longer beneath the weight of other people's expectations. His horizons had broadened, pushing wide their boundaries to become limitless vistas. Tonight, for the first time in his life, the entire world literally lay at his feet.

Jeez, but it sure is cold up here. As he moved from the centre of the roof towards its edge, Lenny found his thoughts momentarily tugged back from the heavens by more mundane concerns. Maybe I should've worn something warmer, he thought. He was shivering, the cold biting through the thin fabric of his vest as a chill wind rose up from the city streets below and blew its way across the rooftop. Even as he watched his breath turn to white mist in the air, it suddenly occurred to him that the cold was a blessing. With it, he felt revitalised and reawakened, his physical senses enhanced to pristine sharpness by the subtle workings of the wind, the frigid temperature on the rooftop, and his own new-found sense of freedom. He could see things more clearly now than he ever had before. It was as though he saw the world with new eyes, gazing at all the things around him for the first time. He saw the moon. He saw the stars. He saw the sky, the city, the night.

Most of all, he saw his own life. His years behind him, wasted and misused, his days spent staring listlessly at the Tri-D in his living room like untold millions of other bored and dejected souls elsewhere in the city. Now he stood on the brink of a brighter and more attractive future. Briefly he thought of his girlfriend, Melanie, back in their apartment. He found himself wishing she could be there with him to enjoy the moment. For an instant he wondered why she was not there, a troubling sense of disquiet suddenly picking at the edges of his mind. Then he cast such earthbound cares aside. Melanie's absence hardly mattered. This moment was not one to be shared with others. It was his and his alone. He was at the threshold of a new life. The long twilight of his existence was finally about to give way to the brilliance of a brand new dawn.

A new dawn...

Captivated by that thought, an idle fancy crossed his mind. He could wait for the real dawn, pausing until the first rosy glimmer of morning appeared in the east, before taking his maiden flight. The symmetry was appealing. He and the city would experience their respective dawns together. For the city, the dawning of a new day; for him, the dawning of a new life. In the end he was forced to reject the idea as swiftly as it had come to him. Symmetry or not, the rising of the sun was still an hour or more away, and he could not bear to wait so long before taking flight. The excitement growing inside him would not allow it. He had waited too long already. He

must fly. Here, now, immediately. Every minute wasted was another minute lost.

Stepping on to the parapet of the roof, Lenny felt a sudden giddiness as he looked over the edge at the streets far below him. It was a long way down. For an instant, his nerve almost failed him. He nearly succumbed to the temptation to turn around, leave the rooftop, and write the whole thing off as a bad idea to begin with. Then, unbidden, the memory of the impulse that had first brought him to the rooftop returned to him and hardened his resolve. The sky was waiting for him. He knew every word of it was true. He felt it in the core of his being. The sky was waiting for him. He would not disappoint it. He would not give in to his fears. Tonight, Lenny Kaspasian would fly.

Moving closer to the edge, he drew in a deep breath, spread his arms wide and prepared for take-off. The wind had risen, growing stronger, whipping around him in a dozen different directions at once. He swallowed hard. His mouth had gone dry. His knees were shaking. He felt curiously light-headed. He inched his way forward until the toes of his shoes were in line with the roof edge. It's now or never, Lenny, he told himself. Remember, they say the first flight is the hardest. It's time for you to earn your wings. Summoning every ounce of his courage, he jumped, his voice all but lost to the wind as he shouted out a last message in defiance of his fears.

"Look out, world! Here I come!"

It soon became clear that the Arnwold woman was far more trusting than most people in Mega-City One. For William, entering her apartment could not have been easier. He had simply rung the doorbell, calling out that he was from Synthi-Flora in response to her query from the other side of the door. Then, even before he had been given the opportunity to mention the flowers and candy, Melanie Arnwold had opened the door to him. An auburn-haired woman with a pear-shaped figure, she had greeted him with a smile, the shifting sanguine shades of her soulshadow swirling rapidly in the air around her as she stood in the doorway.

"A delivery?" she asked. Her tone was excited, almost breathless. "For me? Really?"

"Yes," William replied. The light spilling from her aura was painful to him. It seemed to burn through his eyes. He felt a sick, queasy sensation in

the pit of his stomach, the unwelcome companion to a throbbing urgent headache that felt like it was about to split open his skull. He forced himself to maintain his own smile, concentrating on preventing the pain coursing through him from showing on his face. If the woman were to become alarmed too soon it could ruin everything. "It's flowers and candy. You have to sign for it."

"Of course I do!" She seemed delighted. Her smile growing ever broader, she gabbled excitedly. "Yes, of course. He sent me flowers and candy, of course! Please, won't you come in?" Gesturing for William to follow her, she turned to head from the hallway into the living room. "I just have to fetch my purse."

"There's really no need for that." Finding himself strangely unnerved by the woman's manner, William closed the door behind him and stepped into the apartment hallway. "To pay me, I mean. It's all been taken care of. The delivery charge was paid by your secret admirer."

"My secret admirer?" As William made his way towards the living room, he heard the woman laughing. "Oh no, really, that's priceless. Did you hear that, Lenny? He called you my secret admirer! You, you big bear! And to think I thought you'd forgotten it was our six-month anniversary."

Suddenly, realising there must be someone else in the apartment with them, William froze. As he stood in the hallway, unsure what to do next, he heard a man's voice call out from elsewhere in the apartment.

"What was that? I was in the can. I couldn't hear what you were saying."

"I said the delivery man's arrived with the flowers and candy you ordered from Synthi-Flora," the woman's voice called out from the living room in reply. "I said, until he showed up, I thought you'd forgotten our anniversary."

"Our anniversary?" Momentarily, the man's voice paused. "Uh... No, Mel... You know me... I wouldn't forget a thing like that."

There was the sound of a vacuum pan flushing. Then a chubby man in a stained vest appeared in a doorway off the hall, and looked at William in suspicion.

"I thought she said you were a delivery guy?" The man stared at William, the expression of suspicion on his face slowly giving way to belligerence. "From Synthi-Flora, she said. Where's your uniform?"

"I'm wearing it," William said. Returning the stare, he saw the man's soulshadow was composed of varied and murky shades of brown. The

colours of shit, William thought, feeling a hard kernel of stony anger forming in his heart. The man's presence was an unnecessary complication, a distraction, an annoyance. William wanted to be alone with Melanie Arnwold. The boyfriend would just have to go. "I'm wearing my uniform, Lenny." He repeated himself, letting his voice become more forceful. "Lenny? That's your name, isn't it? Lenny."

"Yeah," the man nodded dully, his earlier belligerence replaced by slack-jawed agreement. "Lenny. That's my name."

"And you can see my uniform," William said to him. "I'm wearing a Synthi-Flora delivery uniform. You can see it, can't you, Lenny?"

"Uh, sure." For a second the man stared at him in dumb confusion, before nodding once more in obedience. "Yeah, you're wearing a uniform. Synthi-Flora. I can see it."

"Good. You know what I think, Lenny? I think you look bored. You look like a man with too much time on his hands. Like a man who doesn't know what to do with himself."

"Yeah, that's true," Lenny nodded with more vigour. "I'm bored. I got too much time on my hands. I don't know what to do with myself."

"Bat-gliding is a fun and rewarding hobby," William told him. "Why don't you try it? Right now. After all, you are wearing your wings and a lo-grav unit already."

"I'm wearing my wings?" Raising an arm, the man looked at it in incomprehension. "S'funny. I don't remember putting them on, or even having any."

"It doesn't matter whether or not you remember it, Lenny." William's voice grew yet more forceful. "There they are. You can see them." Seeing the man nodding, he continued. "So, what are you doing here? The sky is waiting for you, Lenny, and you want to fly. Go upstairs to the roof and do it. Now!"

"The sky is waiting for me," Lenny muttered. "I want to fly." A contented smile lifting the corners of his mouth, he hurried past William and opened the door to leave the apartment. As the man stepped out into the corridor, William closed the door behind him, catching a last glimpse of the man as he wandered to the elevator, towards his great adventure.

"Where's Lenny?" Turning, William saw that the woman had emerged from the living room with a purse in her hand and was now looking at him quizzically. "I thought I heard him talking to you?"

"He's gone, Melanie," William smiled at her. Inwardly, he was still fuming. Granted, he had managed to get rid of the boyfriend, but it had only bought him a small window of opportunity. He would have to do this one quickly, before the idiot Lenny met his inevitable fate, and the Judges or some busybody neighbour came to tell his girlfriend the news. "But you can see that it doesn't matter, can't you? It's better that we're alone. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes." She nodded happily. She was smiling, obedient. He could see she would not trouble him like the Sharn woman had.

"Good." Somehow, he found her simpering agreeableness almost as aggravating as Velma Sharn's disobedience had been. He wanted to punish her, to hurt her. The killing urge grew stronger inside him. The light of her soulshadow stung his eyes. His heart was pounding, his head throbbing in a painful and competing rhythm. He wanted to take his time with her, but circumstance would not allow it. He would have to work quickly. "Stay where you are, Melanie," he told her as his hand went to the knife and he moved closer to her. "Stand still and lift your chin up. Higher, higher, that's it. There's a good girl. A little bit higher and soon it will all be over."

She was a Red. He had a knife.

What happened next came naturally.

He was falling. Falling like a skydiver, the floors and windows of the block beside him whipping past him at breakneck speed, the wind whistling by his ears. Falling, diving headfirst towards the pavement; head down, his arms tucked into his body, his legs pushed out straight behind him, gravity pulling him ever faster towards the Earth. He was falling like a stone.

It was the greatest feeling ever. Falling, Lenny heard his own voice scream in exhilaration. Adrenaline surged through his body. He felt like he was made of steel. He was a bullet falling from the heavens. He wanted to shout out in joy to the streets below him. Look at me! This is what it is to feel like an eagle! This is what it is to fly! Seeing the ground rushing closer, he realised the time had come to correct his course. He had only to adjust the position of his wings to break out of the dive and his momentum would slingshot him up towards the sky. The smallest of movements and he would soar above the city, along the way bidding all of his earthly woes goodbye. He extended his arms, expecting the sudden wrench of G forces as the wind caught his wings and he changed direction.

Nothing happened.

He was still falling. He was hurtling from the sky. The ground was coming closer. Deciding he must have got his angles wrong, Lenny moved his arms again. Still nothing. He moved them again. Still, the ground was rushing closer. Again, nothing he did made any difference. Desperately, Lenny began to flap his arms like a bird. His descent was not slowed one iota. Gazing around him in panic as the pavement rushed towards him, Lenny caught sight of his bare arms flailing uselessly against the air and looked at them in horrified surprise.

Where were his wings?

EIGHT

RED DAWN

Morning brought with it news of another killing. Summoned to the site of a new murder with Weller and the others by an urgent call from Control, Anderson guided her Lawmaster into a parking space on the forecourt of Elizabeth Short Block and eased slowly to a stop. The call had been brief and the details scant. The victim was in Apartment 26-C on the twenty-first floor, tentatively identified as the apartment's registered tenant, Melanie Virginia Arnwold: the third victim of the night.

Looks like that's the creep's pattern, Anderson thought bleakly. Three a night, which means that come tomorrow morning, there will be another three people dead unless we stop him.

She felt tired. Not just physically tired, but drained to the depths of her soul. In the course of her shift she had scanned five murder victims already, not to mention the whip she had found at the Voysich apartment earlier in the night. And, while that was not unusual in itself, given the rampant crime rate in the city where she worked, the nature of the killings meant that each scan had taken its toll on her. Even by the standards of Mega-City One, Brenda Maddens and the other victims had died ugly, brutal deaths. And now, like it or not, she was about to experience the same thing all over again.

What we need is someone to invent a psychic robot, she thought with grim humour. Sure, that would mean I'd be out of a job, but you wouldn't hear me complaining.

Even the sky seemed to have been touched by the killings. Her eyes straying to the sun as it rose over the block, Anderson saw that the spreading light of dawn had turned the sky to a lurid and foreboding shade of red. It seemed fitting somehow, as though the blood staining the gutters of Mega-City One had found some way of working an influence over the heavens.

"Red sky in the morning," she said to herself. Then, realising she had inadvertently uttered the words aloud, she turned to the Judges beside her and shrugged. "I seem to remember that's supposed to mean something."

"It means we've got a perp to catch," Weller said. The coming of the dawn had done little to lighten the Street Judge's mood. Every hour they

had spent on the case together seemed to make Weller more antagonistic. As they made their way from the parking spaces to the block entrance, Weller's mouth tightened in displeasure as he noticed that half a dozen Tri-D news crews had gathered outside the block.

"Drokking vultures." As they approached the news crews Weller glowered at them, as though daring any of the assembled reporters to attempt an interview. Reading his expression correctly, and wary of Mega City One's strict laws against media interference in Judicial investigations, the gaggle of reporters silently parted to let the Judges pass. "You don't get this much media interest in a simple murder. Somebody must have told them it's a serial case. You ask me, we should make some arrests, and sweat them in interrogation until they give up their source, and we find out where the hell the leak came from."

"We haven't got time," Anderson reminded him. "You said it yourself, we've got a perp to catch."

Entering the block, they rode the elevator to the twenty-first floor in silence. Yoakim fidgeted, Noland checked his mediscanner and other equipment, and Weller stood with his eyes fixed on the elevator door in front of him in a thousand-yard-stare. No jokes, no muttered asides, no conversation. Anderson suddenly realised that her companions had been every bit as much affected by the investigation as she had. It did not matter that they were unable to phychically experience the last moments of each victim's pain. Yoakim, Noland, even Weller: they had each witnessed enough in the last few hours to give nightmares to even the most callous and hardened Judge. The horrors visited upon the body of Velma Sharn had seen to that.

Have to expect this next one to be worse than the last one, Anderson thought. It would be in keeping with the progression so far. Each time, the mutilations the killer inflicts on his victims have been worse than the time before. Though Grud only knows how he could top what he did to Velma Sharn.

As the elevator door opened at the twenty-first floor, Anderson saw a youthful Street Judge waiting for them in the block corridor. Underneath his helmet, the Judge's face was pale.

"Costigan," the Judge identified himself, nodding to Anderson and the others by way of greeting. "I was the first Judge on the scene. Told Control

to hold off on the usual Teks and Med-Judges. Knew you'd want to get the scene fresh."

"How did you find the body?" Weller asked as Costigan led them towards the apartment. "Did one of the neighbours call it in?"

"No. I was responding to a routine suicide call. One of the block residents took a swan-dive off the roof. The block super told me the jumper's girlfriend lived in Apartment 26-C on the twenty-first, so I came up here to notify her about his death. The apartment door was ajar, and when I entered I found her body."

"You checked the surveillance recordings?" Weller asked him.

"Nothing to help you there," Costigan replied. "The surveillance cameras inside the block are off-line for maintenance." He noticed the other Judges exchanging significant looks between them. "What? What is it?"

"Our boy always seems to choose blocks without internal surveillance," Anderson told him. "It's part of his pattern."

"So he's not dumb, then," Costigan said. "Just crazy."

"Why do you say that?" Anderson asked, vaguely surprised that the Street Judge's opinion so closely echoed the discussion between her and Noland earlier.

"He has to be crazy," Costigan answered. As he approached Apartment 26-C, he pushed open the door and stood back to let the others enter before him. "Believe me, once you see what he did to his victim, you'll know exactly what I mean."

Yoakim went in first, a scanalyser in his hand as he indicated to the Judges behind him which path to take through the apartment to avoid trampling on the physical evidence. Following the Tek-Judge's lead, Anderson stepped carefully over the bloodstains and drag marks on the floor of the apartment hallway. At first sight, it seemed the killer had followed his usual MO: attacking his victim in the hallway, and then dragging her elsewhere to begin the mutilations. This time, instead of the kitchen, the trail led into the living room. She heard Yoakim's voice gasp out an oath in quiet horror as he advanced to the living room and saw what was waiting for them. Moving past him, Anderson gained her first glimpse of the killer's latest atrocity.

It was a woman, or it had been once. Her body lay on its back on the sofa in the middle of the living room, her blouse ripped away, her mouth still open as though frozen in a silent scream that had stayed with her past her

death. As with the body of Velma Sharn, the killer had cut open the victim's torso and removed her inner organs.

With Velma the perp had carefully severed each organ from its blood vessels and associated viscera, and placed each organ it is own jar. With Melanie Arnworld he had left all of the organs still attached: the heart, lungs, liver, small intenstines. They were splayed out on the floor all around the victim, the unravelled spool of veins and arteries from each organ leading directly back to the hole in her ruined torso like the tentacles of some strange creature from the depths of the seas. Her foot narrowly avoiding stepping on one of the woman's kidneys as she moved towards the body, Anderson found herself once more fighting the urge to vomit. Guess the bastard managed to top himself after all, Anderson thought, swallowing hard to keep the contents of her stomach from rising. I thought the Sharn crime scene was bad, but this one is worse.

"Cause of death was a single slash wound to the throat, just like the others," Noland said. Picking his way cautiously through the carpet of blood and entrails surrounding the body, he bent forward to peer at the wound in the victim's neck. "From the angle of the cut, he was standing facing her when he struck the fatal blow. Lots of blood on the carpet, most of it fresh. I think he might have dragged her to the sofa while she was still dying, rather than waiting until she was dead like he did with the others. Maybe he was pushed for time. Hmm, I wonder..." Bending closer, he pulled a digi-thermometer from his belt and pressed it into the victim's ear. "The body's still pretty warm." Putting the thermometer away, he lifted one of the dead woman's arms. "Given that, and the lack of rigor mortis, I'd say she's been dead no more than an hour. Assuming it would have taken at least twenty to twenty-five minutes for the killer to perform these mutilations, he could still be in the vicinity. Maybe even still in the building."

"We could put out an APB," Yoakim said. "Alert all patrolling Judges to be on the lookout for a perp in a black overcoat, who may or not be wearing a delivery uniform underneath it."

"All right, do it," Anderson told him as she moved closer to the body. "Meanwhile, I'll see if there's any way for us to improve on that description. This is the freshest body we've had yet. Maybe if I scan it now, without waiting for Noland to do his prelim, I'll be able to put a definite face to this bastard once and for all." Without any further ritual or preparation, she

pulled off her glove. Then, taking a deep breath as she looked down into the open and staring eyes of the corpse before her, she laid her palm across the dead woman's forehead.

Contact.

He was killing her. She could not breathe. She could not scream. She could not cry out. She heard air hissing through the wound in her throat and knew it was her own death rattle. The delivery man was standing over her, the knife making a wet tearing sound as he slid it into her body: pain. His face was covered in blood: blood. He was smiling as he pushed his hands into her stomach: anguish. Even through the fear and terror, the helplessness and the horror, her mind was filled with desperate questions. Where was Lenny? Why had he left her? Why wasn't he here to save her? The world was darkening at the edges. Her vision was fading. Her last sight before her eyes succumbed to darkness was a final image of the delivery man, his hands slick with blood, holding something dripping in front of her face as he leered down at her in triumph. She could not be sure, but she thought it looked like one of her kidneys. Then, discarding it over his shoulder, the delivery man turned to plunge his hands into her body again as the darkness expanded to claim her...

Abruptly, the contact was broken. There was nothing left to see. The awfulness of the last passing moments of Melanie Arnwold's life had obliterated any further psychic impressions that might otherwise have remained with her body. Removing her palm from the woman's forehead, Anderson instinctively used her hand to close the dead woman's eyelids. As a Psi-Judge, it was as close as she would ever come to performing last rites. If she had been of a religious persuasion, she might have said a prayer. As it was, she paused in aid of a more secular promise.

I'll find him, she thought. It felt like a vow, although she knew that even if she had spoken the words aloud, Melanie Arnwold was past hearing them. I'll find the man who did this to you and bring him in. I don't care how long it takes, I won't let him get away with this.

"He was wearing a delivery uniform again," she said at last to the other Judges around her. She looked at Noland. "You were right. She was still alive when he began the mutilations. I couldn't get a look at his face, it was covered in blood." She turned to Judge Costigan. "When you entered the apartment, did you find any evidence that the perp cleaned himself up before he left?"

"Yeah, 'fraid so," Costigan nodded. "I heard a faucet running in the bathroom. When I checked, I found blood in the bathroom sink and on the towels. The perp must have washed his face."

"I don't hear any water running now," Weller said.

"No, you wouldn't," Costigan shrugged. "The sink was overflowing so I turned the faucet off."

"You did what?" There was a rising tone of anger in Weller's voice. "This is a crime scene. Didn't anybody ever tell you at the Academy about interfering with evidence? If the killer touched the faucet handle, Anderson could have scanned it. She might have picked up psychic impressions from our perp. Now, thanks to you, the only impressions there are probably yours!"

"I... I thought if I left it running the water might wash evidence away," Costigan's face blanched, becoming paler. "I didn't think..."

"I'll say you didn't think." Weller was almost shouting, the anger he had hidden inside him all night, spilling out at the nearest available target. "This is a drokking serial killer case. We need every bit of evidence we can get. When I get back to the Sector House, I'm filing a report with your Watch Commander and asking him to put you on a charge."

"Maybe we should all cool this down a bit." Holding her hands up as a peacemaker, Anderson stepped between Weller and Costigan to try and defuse the confrontation before it grew worse. "All right, so Costigan made a mistake. Chances are though, he didn't harm the investigation. The perp must have touched plenty of things in this apartment, and yet I don't get a sense of him anywhere. It was the same at all the other crime scenes. It's like he's the invisible man." She paused for an instant, the memory of something that had been in the thoughts of Melanie Arnwold returning to her. "Talking of which, while she was dying, Melanie Arnwold was wondering where someone called Lenny was, as though he should have been there to protect her, but had left the apartment."

"Lenny?" Costigan said. "Remember the victim's boyfriend? The jumper? His name was Leonard Kaspasian."

"Sounds like that's our Lenny, then," Anderson said. "Take me to him. I get the feeling I might have more luck scanning him than I will scanning faucet handles." She looked at the other Judges in the apartment. "Noland and Yoakim, I suggest you run the victim's body and the crime scene up here to see what you can find. Weller, it's up to you, but I suggest you come

with me. For all we know, our jumper may have seen the killer. "Let's see what Lenny Kaspasian can tell us."

Falling, he was falling, not flying. His earlier elation had given way to terror. He was screaming. The ground was coming closer. Falling, he was falling to his death. His last thought was a final desperate and despairing question.

Where were his wings?

"The killer's psychic," Anderson said. She was kneeling beside the broken body of Lenny Kaspasian on a pedway just behind Elizabeth Short Block. The impact from the two-hundred storey fall had flattened his body, crushing his bones and liquifying his insides, leaving a elongated crater beneath him in the plascrete surface where he had landed. "Grud, I should have seen it before. The killer is a teledominant."

"A tele-what?" Weller asked. He and Costigan were nearby, though she noticed both Street Judges had decided to stand far enough away from the impact site to prevent their boots from being soiled by any of the blood that had splattered from Lenny's body.

"A teledominant," Anderson said. "His psychic power allows him to mentally dominate other people and make them believe anything he wants them to." She straightened her legs and stood up, and then turned to face Weller. "In this case, when the killer arrived at Melanie Arnwold's apartment he found Lenny Kaspasian there as well. He decided to get rid of him. He told Lenny - and I quote - 'Bat-gliding is a fun and rewarding hobby'. Next, he told Lenny he was wearing wings and a lo-grav unit, which, as you can see, he wasn't. Then, he told him he should climb up to the roof and take his maiden flight immediately. And Lenny believed it all, every word of it, which is how come he ended up looking like synthi-pancake spread all over the pedway."

"Hmm, from the sounds of it he was as dumb as drokk, then." Weller looked down at the dead man in derision.

"No," Anderson shook her head. "Admittedly, I don't get the feeling Lenny was the sharpest tool in the box, but all the brains in the world won't help you resist a teledominant's powers of suggestion. You know how they say a hypnotist can't make you do anything you wouldn't be willing to do normally? A teledominant doesn't have to put up with those kinds of restrictions. He can make you jump off a building, run naked across the

megway at rush hour, gouge out your own eyeballs with a spoon, or push your grandmother down the stairs. The only limits are the teledominant's imagination and the victim's will power. And, no offence, but most non-psychics don't have what it takes in that department to resist a teledominant's orders."

She paused for a short while to think, turning to stare down at Lenny Kaspasian's body, before raising her eyes to the windows of the block next to them. The killer is psychic. She suddenly realised it was what her intuition had been trying to tell her at the Sharn crime scene at Mary Kelly Block. The killer is psychic. With that thought, she felt the pieces of her investigation start to fall into place.

"You realise this explains everything?" she said to Weller as she turned to him once more. "The different faces I saw on the killer in each psi-scan, the flowers and candy, or the lack of them. And you were right when you said the killer couldn't have been wearing a delivery uniform. Every discrepancy between the physical evidence and what I saw in the scans is explained by the fact that the killer is a teledominant. He shows up at each apartment, tells his victims he's a delivery man, and they believe him because his power compels them to. He doesn't need to be wearing a uniform or carrying anything. If he tells them he's from Synthi-Flora, then that's what they see. The victims' own minds fill in all the blanks for him. That's why one victim sees him as a short man, and another one sees him as being tall. When the killer told them he was a delivery man, each victim's mind automatically called up memories of delivery men they had seen in the past and superimposed those images over their killer's features."

"So that's why there's no sign of a delivery man in the exterior surveillance footage?" Weller said. "That's what helps make this drokker such a ghost?"

"Exactly." Excited at having finally reached a breakthrough in the investigation, the words now flowed out of Anderson but breathless bursts. "And, you know what else? This could even have a bearing on the lack of internal surveillance footage inside the blocks. It had occurred to me: how did the killer know the surveillance cameras were offline in some of the blocks? Did he have access to the maintenance logs? Was he casing each block in advance? But if he's a teledominant, for all we know when he finds a place with cameras, he just has a quiet word in the block super's ear and suggests they should be taken offline. If the perp is smart enough, he could

even fix it so the super wouldn't remember the conversation afterwards, and we already know that this guy is plenty smart."

She paused again, casting her mind back to her memories of the psychometric scans she had performed on each victim: Margaret Penrith, Vincent Henk, Eunice Bibbs, Brenda Maddens, Velma Sharn and Melanie Arnwold. There was a common thread running through all their experiences of the killer. A thread that ran true even in the collateral damage death of Lenny Kaspasian, killed as an afterthought - an addendum to the murder of his girlfriend.

"His voice," Anderson said. "That's how the killer works his mojo. Some teledominants are able to control their victims through telepathic commandment. With our perp, I think his power is tied directly to his voice. I mean, it's a psychic power, so obviously the real source of his ability is his brain, but I think the killer is accustomed to using his voice as the conduit. When he activates his powers, people treat everything he says like it was the word of Grud. He tells his victims to stay still, to lift their chins, and they do exactly what he tells them, even when they see him pull out a knife. That's how he managed to kill three victims with a single slash wound when they were standing facing him. With his powers, he knew they wouldn't struggle."

"What about the Sharn woman?" Weller asked her. "She fought back. She even bit him."

"It could be she was an exception," Anderson said. "Maybe she had the will power to resist him. That's what got him so steamed that he pulled out all her organs and put them in jars. After that, he realised that mutilating his victims, so completely, gave him vastly more satisfaction. So, when he killed Melanie Arnwold, he wanted to mutilate her the same way, but the presence of her boyfriend complicated things. He told Lenny to throw himself off the roof, but all the same he knew that was likely to bring the Judges to Melanie's apartment sooner rather than later. He didn't have time to sever the organs from the blood vessels and arrange them in containers like he did with Velma Sharn. So he did the next best thing, doing the best job he could in the time at his disposal."

"Hmm. Looks like you've got it all figured out," Weller said grudgingly.

"I wouldn't go that far, but it's a start." Noticing a sour expression come over Weller's face, Anderson realised the Street Judge did not share her

excitement. "What is it, Weller? You look like I just offered you a cup of rat piss and told you it was soy-cola. Can't you see this is a real breakthrough?"

"A breakthrough?" Weller pursed his lips in disapproval. "That's what you'd call it, huh? If this is what passes your standard for a breakthrough, Anderson, I'd say you are pretty easily pleased. Bad enough we're already working a serial case with no real leads to work on. We don't know who the killer is, what he looks like, or even how he goes about choosing his victims. And now, now you say the perp is a dangerous psychic, able to control people's minds and compel them to do whatever he tells them? I hate to have to bring you back to Earth with a bang, but if what you say about him is true, then I'd say it just got about a million times more difficult for us to catch him."

NINE

THE BIRTH OF MONSTERS

It had been a long night, and the monster William Ganz was tired.

Yawning, he lay down to sleep curled under a blanket on a thin mattress on the floor of his lair. His lair; that was his name for the space he inhabited inside the derelict and fire-ravaged basement of a long deserted con-apt building. He could have called it his home, his room, or even his dwelling. Somehow though, he preferred the word lair. It seemed more fitting. Deep inside himself he recognised something that to the rest of the world was only conjecture. Deep inside, he realised he was a monster. Granted, he was neither clawed nor fanged, nor were his features in any way particularly revolting. But for all that, he knew he was a monster, just as he knew that the status of a monster demanded certain standards of him. A monster could not have an apartment. A monster must have its lair.

He was tired, so tired. He had needed to work swiftly, cutting her open and pulling the organs from her body with no time to arrange them. Then, he had fled the scene, careful to keep his face lowered, staring down at the ground to make it harder for the cameras outside the block to catch his likeness. The Grey Man had taught him that. The Grey Man had told him to buy clothes made of Stay Kleen. He had promised him the internal surveillance cameras in the blocks where he killed would not be working. He had even given him pointers on killing. "Use a knife," the Grey Man had told him. "Guns are always more trouble than they're worth. They jam. They misfire. With slugthrowers you have to worry about ballistics and shell casings, with lasers it's flash patterns and energy cell failure. Admittedly, guns can have their uses, but for quick and quiet work, the professional knows there is no better tool than a knife." As with everything else since his release from the institution, William had listened to the Grey Man's good advice. Not that he had needed much prompting in that regard. Guns were so impersonal. When it came to the work of killing reds, the knife was better.

Tired, so tired. As sleep approached him and his consciousness slowly receded, William felt the throbbing of the wound in his hand as a dull and distant ache. He had stopped at a pharmacy on his way home to his lair to fill the prescription the doctor in the clinic had given him. The instructions

were printed on the bottle: two tablets, to be taken twice a day with a glass of water. For a moment, when it came time to take the first tablets, William had wavered uncertainly. The years he had spent in the institution had left him with an instinctive mistrust of doctors and their pills. Finally, he had realised these pills were there to help him; not to help him in the way his doctors in the institution had talked about, with all their stupid and well-meaning lies. No. These pills would not make his brain sluggish and compliant. They would not stop him from seeing auras. They would simply prevent his hand from becoming infected, and he needed his hand to be in good working order. It would be hard to be a monster if he only had one hand to kill with.

Tired, tired. His breathing becoming slow and regular, he drifted off to sleep. As so often when the cares of the world left him, William's dreams turned to memories of his past. He dreamed of his father, his childhood, the years in the institution. He dreamed of the days and nights before he had become a monster. He dreamed of all of these things, safe and secure in the knowledge that in his dreams they could no longer harm him. He dreamed.

William dreamed, and he remembered...

Memories...

Daytime, the apartment in Ciudad Barranquilla, the hot summer sun streaming in through the apartment windows, William is two years old. He is sitting on the rug in the middle of the living room floor, playing with his toys: Plasteen building blocks. He arranges them methodically by size and colour. Nearby, his father sits in an armchair, watching and waiting.

"William." His father calls out to him. "William, look over there." He croons softly as he speaks. "There, over by the wall. You can see it, can't you?"

Spying movement in the corner, William looks up, his eyes following his father's pointing finger. A spider, there is a spider in the apartment. To William's eyes it seems huge, menacing. The spider's body is as big as one of his father's hands. Its legs are black and swift. The spider glares at him, its eyes glittering like malevolent jewels as they catch the light. Staring back at it, William feels terror growing inside him. With an unexpected motion, the spider darts towards him. William screams.

As he screams, the spider disappears, fading away like a shadow before the sun. Soon, it is as though it was never there.

Sitting back in his chair, his father smiles.

Night. The years have passed. He is five years old. The spiders come to him every night. Lying in his bed, curled under the covers, William hears them scuttling across the floor. Pulling the covers tighter around his head, he tries to block out the sound. Scuttling, so loud there must be dozens of them, hundreds, thousands. In his mind he imagines the spiders as a writhing black tide spreading out to engulf every inch of the floor. Terrified, he puts his head under the pillow. He tries not to make any noise. Perhaps if the spiders do not hear him they will simply leave him alone. Suddenly aware of the sound of his own breathing, he fears it will give him away. He holds his breath. In the darkness, he hears the spiders creeping closer...

Closer.

His terror growing, William feels a tiny vibration across the surface of his bed clothes. One of the spiders is climbing the bed. Feeling the vibration move nearer, he realises it is under the covers with him. The spider's body brushes against his leg. It is too much. He can keep silent no longer. The terror inside him must have release. William screams.

Abruptly, the scuttling noises cease. His senses tell him the spiders are gone. It is as though they were never there.

Sitting in the dark on a chair at the foot of the bed, his father smiles.

Daytime, a year later, for once, William is alone in the apartment. His father has gone out to make one of his irregular forays into the world outside. Sometimes, when his father makes these trips without him, William feels sad. He wishes his father would take him with him. To William, the apartment is his entire world. He has never been outside it. Except for the Tri-D and the view through the window, he has never seen the city where they live. At other times, William is happy that his father is absent. The spiders only come when his father is in the apartment. So long as his father is away, William is safe. The spiders leave him alone.

The doorbell rings. At first, William ignores it. His father has rules. Rule One: William is not to answer the doorbell. Rule Two: he is not to talk to strangers. Rule Three: he is never to mention the spiders. Rule Four...

The doorbell rings again, more insistently this time, and again, louder. Long minutes pass and the ringing continues. This never happens. Normally, a caller rings the bell once or twice, and then gives up when there

is no reply, but this caller is persistent. As William stands by the door, listening to the bell ring and ring, a troubling thought occurs to him. Perhaps it is his father outside? Perhaps he has forgotten his keycard and needs William to open the door for him? Then again, his father could be testing him. Perhaps he is waiting outside to punish William if he breaks the rules? Further minutes pass as William weighs his options and the ringing continues. Finally, he reaches a decision.

He opens the door.

A man is standing in the hallway. He is holding an electronic clipboard and has a holo-card with a picture of his face on it pinned to his jacket. He talks in Spanish, and then switches to English when he realises that William does not understand him. The man tells him he works for the Department of Child Welfare. He asks William why he is not in school. He asks to see his father. When William tells him that his father is not home, the man says he will wait. He steps into the apartment, closing the door behind him. Looking around him, he seems surprised to see the undulating ridges of sound-proofing materials covering every wall of the apartment. After making a note on his clipboard, he sits on the sofa. He talks to William, asking him about his toys. Little by little, he gains William's trust.

Eventually, William tells him about the spiders.

"You understand, senor, this is an unusual situation," the Child Welfare man says. "Some might even call it suspicious."

When his father arrives back at the apartment, he is annoyed to find the man there waiting for him. He sends William to his bedroom while he and the man talk in the living room. Now, William stands with his ear pressed against his bedroom door, listening.

"First, there is the question of your son," the man says. "He is not enrolled at a school, nor is he registered for home-schooling. The boy has a most vivid imagination. Really, señor, you would not believe some of the things he told me while we were waiting, but there is a more serious matter to be considered. According to Immigration records, your name is Peter Gerald Ganz and you hold a Brit-Cit passport. However, there is a discrepancy. When I directed a routine enquiry to the Brit-Cit authorities, I learned the real Peter Ganz is dead. He died of a gunshot wound five years ago, just before you came to our city. You see my concern, señor?" There is a pause as the man leaves the question to hang unanswered in the air for a

moment. "Of course, I suppose I could simply pass this matter along to my superiors. I am sure they will be able to clear the whole thing up."

"How much?" he hears his father say. "How much do you want?"

"I am a public servant, señor." There is a smile in the man's voice. "It is my duty to report the matter to the relevant authorities." The man pauses again. "Shall we say one hundred thousand credits? It is the going rate for duty here in Ciudad Barranquilla these days, give or take."

His father is angry. After the man leaves, he pours a drink and begins to pace across the living room. Then, still fuming, after a few minutes he puts the drink down and leaves the apartment, slamming the door behind him.

Time passes. Inside his bedroom, William waits in dread of the punishment he is sure will follow.

At length, his father returns. Finishing the drink from earlier, he pours another. He seems restless, yet quietly elated. Picking up the remote control for the Tri-D system, he turns the set on and begins to switch through the channels.

"William!" his father calls out to him. "Come out of your room, now. I want you to see something."

Dutifully, William does as he is told. Standing in his father's shadow, he sees his father turn to a Tri-D news station. The commentary is in Spanish, but William sees pictures of the body of a man covered in blood and lying in the gutter. A road traffic accident, the footage is graphic. Horrified, William tries to look away.

"Look at it," his father says. "I want you to see this."

The camera pans to the face of the dead man. One side of his face is crushed, but William recognises him all the same. It is the man from the Department of Child Welfare.

"The witnesses say he was acting like a madman." His father presses a button on the remote control, causing the picture to freeze-frame on the image of the dead man's face. "He was screaming about spiders, his hands flailing around like he thought they were crawling all over him. In a blind panic, he ran out into the skedway. A traffic accident, that's what they are calling it."

Pressing another button, his father switches the Tri-D set off. He turns to look down at William.

"You understand now why I wanted you to see this?" his father asks him. "You understand what happens when people don't follow the rules? Tell me you understand."

"I understand, father," William says. Looking up, it seems to him that his father is a giant.

"Good. So, in future, you will follow the rules?"

"Yes, father."

"Good," his father smiles.

Following the death of the man from Child Welfare, life in the apartment soon returns to its usual routines. The spiders come for William at different times of the day and night, sometimes singly, more often in great writhing tides of glittering eyes and scuttling legs. Every time the spiders appear, William's father is there, watching him, waiting. And, every time, no matter how hard he tries to control them, William's fears always get the better of him. Time passes. William and his father both grow older while the patterns of their lives remain unaltered. The spiders come. William screams. The spiders disappear. His father smiles.

The spiders come. William screams. The spiders disappear. His father smiles. Always the same pattern. Over time, William begins to realise that his father and the spiders are connected. The spiders only come when his father is in the room. The man from Child Welfare died because he thought there were spiders crawling all over him, yet it is clear from what his father told him that no one else saw them. "The witnesses say he was acting like a madman." A madman, courtesy of some of the shows on the Tri-D, William has already learned that madmen sometimes see things that are not there. Slowly, William ponders that thought and comes to understand a terrible secret. There are no spiders. They are an illusion. An illusion that, somehow, his father is creating. And, if the spiders are an illusion, then there is nothing about them for William to fear.

Sadly, he soon learns that understanding the nature of his problem makes little difference. The next time the spiders appear, he tries to hold his fears in check. He tries to ignore them. He tries to stop himself from screaming, but it is impossible. Real or not, once the spiders have advanced close enough to begin crawling all over him, he finds he is incapable of constraining himself. They feel real. The sensation of hundreds of arachnid legs scurrying across his body is too much to bear. Then, as a spider crawls

up onto his face and attempts to force its way into his mouth, William finally gives in. He can stand it no longer. He screams, louder and longer than he has ever screamed before. And, with it, the spiders disappear. His father smiles.

His father smiles.

Little by little, this fact becomes the focus of William's attentions. Day after day, night after night, his father sends the spiders to torment him. Worse, his father seems to take pleasure in torturing his son. Confused, William finds himself increasingly troubled by a simple question. A question he is too frightened to ask his father directly for fear of punishment, a question that gnaws at him incessantly.

Why?

His father is red.

The answer is revealed to William shortly before his thirteenth birthday. As they sit watching the Tri-D one night, he turns to look at his father and sees him surrounded by a shining nimbus of light. His father's soulshadow is a sickly and murky shade of blood-red, shot through with a faint patchwork of rust-coloured lines. Astounded, William watches the colours of the aura squirm and shift before his eyes, but further revelations are soon forthcoming. That night, when the spiders come for him, as he screams William notices the shades of his father's aura become more brilliant and vivid. Blood-red becomes the colour of shining rubies, the rusting patchwork becomes a web of flaring scarlet. It is as though his father is feeding on his fear, his life-force revitalised and made stronger every time William screams.

Abruptly, William realises something that, until then, his conscious mind has refused to acknowledge. His father is a monster. He keeps him as a prisoner, here in the apartment, so that he can use William for nourishment whenever he chooses. His father is a monster, but what can William do? On the brink of his thirteenth birthday he is still little more than a boy. If he rebels or displeases his father in any way, he will be punished. There is nothing to be done.

In the end, he is powerless.

"William," his father calls to him. "Come here."

It is two months later, and his father has been drinking all day. It is worse when he is drunk, The spiders are larger and they linger longer, prolonging the moment of fear. Hoping to somehow evade his fate, at first William stays where he is, pretending he has not heard his father calling him.

"William. Come here."

His father's voice is more insistent. Miserable, William goes to stand before his father as he sits in his chair. His father's face is grey and lined, his eyes bloodshot, his soulshadow a slowly pulsing and faded shade of reddish brown. He looks old, tired. Looking down at his father, William feels an unfamiliar sensation building inside him. It is rage. He wishes his father were dead. For an instant, he experiences feelings of shame as his mind gives shape to that thought. Then, he casts his shame aside. He is right to feel angry. He is right to know rage. His father tortures him every day. His father feeds on his fear. His father is a monster. He deserves to die.

"Tonight, we could do something different," his father says from his chair. His smile is sardonic. Gloating, he takes a long sip from the glass in his hand, and then glances up at William to breathe an invisible cloud of synthi-whiskey fumes in his son's direction. "Tonight, we could make it centipedes, or maybe rats or beetles. We could make it fire burning at your flesh, or water drowning you, but then, why change a winning formula?" From the corner of his eye, William sees dark shapes moving past the skirting board. He hears the sound of a thousand scuttling feet. His father begins to laugh softly. The pulse of his soulshadow seems to quicken. "Always stick with what works, I say. And I know you like the spiders."

"No!"

The word comes out of William unbidden, with a strange and unexpected force. His father recoils as though struck, the glass falling from his hand to shatter on the floor. The spiders gathering at the periphery of William's vision abruptly disappear. Inwardly shocked at the effect achieved with a single word, William says it once more.

"No."

His father recoils again, pushed back into his chair as though held there by some invisible hand. Listening to the sound of his own voice, William realises there is something different about it. On the surface it is unchanged, but beneath it he can hear a new strength and power. It is as though the transformation that began when he realised he could see his father's

soulshadow has reached some unexpected zenith, and, with it, William is no longer powerless. He says the word again, more quietly this time.

"No."

The effect is the same. His father is pushed back further in his chair, his soulshadow dimming as its colours become more faded. Staring down at him, William sees fear in his father's eyes. It is a new sensation, as new as the feeling of power that now courses through him. William finds it pleasing.

"William..." There is a desperate, pleading edge to his father's voice. "I don't know how you're doing this, but please-"

"Quiet." William's own voice is commanding, forceful. Seeing his father obey him gives him further pleasure. Inwardly, he understands there has been a shift in the tides of authority between them. William is the strong one now, his father the weakling. Looking at his father, William realises that he hates the old man with every fibre of his being. He feels the rage inside himself, as restless as a caged beast, demanding action. His father is at his mercy. This moment is not to be wasted.

"You were wrong to hurt me, Father," William says. "You have to be punished. You see that now, don't you?"

Helpless, as though some unseen giant has hold of his head and is shaking it, his father nods.

"Good," William tells him. He bends down and picks up a broken piece of glass from the floor. The fragment is long and sharp. It is perfect. It is just what he needs.

"Stay still, Father," William says. His back rigid against the chair as though it has been glued in place, his father is compelled to obey him. "Now, lift up your chin. Higher, father, higher, I want to see your throat. That's right. Just a little bit higher and soon it will all be over..."

This time, it is William's turn to smile.

"It seems you killed your father," the man says to him. He is sitting in a chair beside William's bed, looking down at a clipboard in his hands. The name tag pinned to his white coat reads "Doctor Dominguez". "Can you tell me why you did it?"

Opening his mouth, William struggles to speak through the haze enveloping his mind. His brain feels slow and sluggish. He tries to shrug,

and then notices that there are restraints on his arms and legs, tying him to the bed.

"You find it difficult to speak?" The doctor takes a pen from his coat pocket and writes something on the clipboard in front of him. "It is a side-effect of the blow to your head. You know, you are very fortunate, my friend. I understand you ran from the Judges? That was foolish. The Judge in question must have been something of a liberal, to crack your skull with a pain stick rather than simply shoot you down. Still, the neural scan shows there has been no permanent damage. Concentrate, try and frame the words carefully in your mind, and you should find yourself able to speak once more."

A Judge? The doctor's words provoke a flood of memories. In the wake of killing his father, William had left the apartment. Eager to see the world outside with his own eyes, he had walked the night streets of Ciudad Baranquilla for hours, drinking in every sight, sound and sensation. It had been a time of revelation. On the Tri-D, Ciudad Baranquilla was often presented as a glittering paradise of tall towers and rising residential blocks whose opulence matched those of any other city in the world. In reality, William had found the city was far different: a place whose shanty towns and impoverished barrios existed in the shadows of the same towers he had seen on Tri-D.

To William, it had all seemed breathtaking. For years the apartment had been his entire world. Now, at last, he was free of his father and could do as he wished. Finally, as dawn broke in the sky above him, William had returned exhausted to the apartment to find a Judge was waiting for him. The Judge had said something about one of the neighbours finding the door open and calling the authorities. William had panicked. He had tried to run, foolishly it seemed, his last memory a splitting pain in the back of his head before darkness had claimed him.

"Well? Can you speak now?" the doctor asks him. "Can you tell me why you killed your father?"

"Untie me," William tells him. He tries to summon the power in his voice, to compel the doctor to obey him, but it is hopeless. Lost in a haze of painkillers and concussion, he can hardly even speak, never mind make the doctor obey him.

"You want me to remove your restraints?" the doctor smiles, not unkindly. He makes further notes on his clipboard. "I am afraid not, my

friend. The Judges have determined that you killed your father. In accordance with the Law, you will be confined indefinitely. Again, however, you have been most fortunate. As part of his will, your father established a trust fund to see to your future welfare. My understanding is that the trustees of that fund have interceded with the Judges on your behalf. A sum of money has changed hands and you have been sentenced to spend your time in a private psychiatric care facility rather than in prison. This is Ciudad Baranquilla, after all. Here, so long as one has money, there is little that cannot be achieved. Who knows? Perhaps in time, should enough money change hands, you will be judged cured and they will release you back into the community."

Time passes. Inside the institution, William kills two people. The first is a fellow patient whom William kills when the doctors make the mistake of allowing William to mix with the other inmates. Standing in the day room, William notices one of the men there is a Red and strangles him before the attendants can stop him. After that, they put him in a straitjacket and increase his medication. The second man he kills is the doctor whose brains he beats in with a chair after they put him on the blue pills. Two people: to William, it doesn't seem like so many. One of the attendants tells William that there are inmates who have killed dozens of people. The difference is that they did their killing in the world outside. By killing people inside the institution, William has crossed a line. The doctors call him dangerous. They order him locked up in a room, all on his own; a room with padded walls and only one small window. Really, it is like being a prisoner in the apartment again, only worse. At least in the apartment, his father never gave him pills.

They make him take a half a dozen different pills every day: yellow ones, green ones, pink ones, white. The pills make it hard to think. They make it hard to remember. They make him tired. Some days, all William does is sleep. Worse, the pills stop him from using the power in his voice. If only they would take him off the pills, he is sure he could escape, but the doctors refuse to stop his medication. And so, day after day, William sits in his room and dreams of escape.

"I think I can help you, William," the Grey Man says to him. "The fact is, I think we can help each other."

A new day comes, and William has a visitor. The first one he has seen in all his time in the institution, but this man is special in more ways than one. He has no soulshadow. At first, when the attendant opens the door to his cell and the Grey Man steps inside, William is afraid the doctors have changed his medication again and he has lost his ability to see soulshadows. Then, he notices the attendant's soulshadow - green tinged with blue - and realises there is something different about his visitor: a man without a soulshadow. If it was not for the evidence right in front of him, William would have thought it was impossible. A man without a soulshadow; it is as though he is face to face with a man without a soul.

"From your records, I understand you have killed three people," the Grey Man says. For a moment, William wonders whether he is a doctor, but swiftly dismisses the idea. Doctors have soulshadows coloured in shades of blue and yellow, sometimes tinged with violet. He has never seen a doctor without an aura, any more than he has seen any human being like the Grey Man before. The Grey Man: that is what William decides to call him after perhaps a minute in his presence. It is not the fact that the man's clothes are grey, though they are. Nor even the fact that his hair is grey, which it isn't. No, it is simply that in comparison to the flowing colours he sees in other human souls, to William's eyes a man without an aura seems grey.

"Three people." The Grey Man purses his lips as though considering something. "Of course, that is hardly an impressive total, especially considering one of them wasn't even a Red. Still, I suppose it's a start."

Shocked, William looks at the Grey Man with wide eyes. How did he know about the reds? Naturally, William has told his doctors about them, but the doctors never listened.

"You know about the reds?" William leans forward, excited. At last, he may have found a kindred spirit.

"Of course I do, William," the Grey Man tells him. "I know all about them. In fact, I have a list of reds right here. I want you to kill them for me. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

William nods.

The Grey Man smiles.

William dreamed. Safe and comfortable under a blanket in his lair, he dreamed of his past. He dreamed of his victims to date, and he dreamed of his victims tomorrow. He dreamed, knowing that come nightfall he would

walk the streets of the city again and seek out the next three names on the Grey Man's list. He dreamed the dreams of a monster, knowing there was a safety in that exalted status. So long as he was a monster, he need never fear his father. He need never fear his past. He need never fear his dreams. He was no longer the small scared child of his youth, afraid of spiders. He was reborn as William Ganz, the murderer. William Ganz, the killer of reds. William Ganz, the monster.

He dreamed, his dreams straying from the past to the future. Even as he slept, he saw the Grey Man's list in his mind, the names written in his dreams with letters of fire. He dreamed of the next name on the list, the two words of the name figuring large in his mind like a promise yet to be fulfilled. A promise he would keep once the light of the day he slept through was gone and night had come to the city once more; a promise that, for William, began and ended with those two words. The name of his first victim of the night to come; the name of the next Red he would kill.

Marjorie Kulack.

TEN

HEARING VOICES

I can't believe she's going out with Eduardo, a voice said inside Marjorie Kulack's head. *What the hell does she see in him? Everybody knows he's a no-good creep.*

Half a kilogram, another voice joined it. *I've been on this drokking diet for three weeks! How could I have only lost half a kilogram?*

Damn Tri-D is broken again, a third voice said. *And after the repairman swore he'd fixed it! I've got a good mind to take this piece of junk over to the shop and demand my money back.*

She was hearing things again. Sitting alone in her apartment on the fifteenth floor of Sissy Spacek Block, Marjorie Kulack cupped her head in her hands and groaned in despair. It had been the same way for weeks now. Morning, noon and night, she heard an incessant babble of voices in her head. True, she knew she was hardly unusual in that regard; you only had to turn on the Tri-D for the news flashes on the latest citizen to turn psycho or go futzy to know there were plenty of people in Mega-City One who heard voices in their heads. What made Marjorie's voices worse was the nature of the things they talked about. Other people's voices told them they were the Messiah, the reincarnation of Elvis Presley, or the Emperor Napoleon. Grud, she only wished her voices were as interesting as that. Frankly, as far as Marjorie was concerned, they talked nothing other than complete and utter drivel.

I can't believe that drokking Pieterson baby is still crying, she heard one of her voices say. *Somebody should complain to the Judges. Damn thing's kept me up all drokking night.*

And so it went, on and on without respite, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. Marjorie heard hundreds of different voices in her head gabbling on about the most mundane and boring things. They talked about shopping, Tri-D programmes and the Megalot. They gossiped about her neighbours. They bitched. They whined. They complained, and worst of all, some of them even said nasty things about Marjorie herself. It was all becoming too much. Sometimes, it was like she was going crazy.

So now Constance is marrying Brad? I thought she was married to Dirk. Damn soaps. You miss a couple of episodes, and suddenly everything

changes.

In search of relief, Marjorie had been to her doctor and told him about her problem. Telling him she felt like she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, she had begged for his help. In response, all the doctor had done was put her on a course of antidepressants. "It's just stress," he had told her, barely looking at her as he hit a key on his comp-terminal to print up a prescription. "I see from your records that you're going through a divorce. It's probably just a reaction to that. Take three tablets a day, and then come and see me again in a week."

Have to remember to tell Martha I saw Marjorie Kulack yesterday, she heard a voice whisper spitefully in her head. *What a skank, I know she's let herself go recently, but really you couldn't blame her husband for leaving her. Who'd want to lie down with that big moose every night when you could be getting busy with Betsy Winters.*

Feeling her cheeks grow wet, Marjorie realised she was crying. The last voice had really hit home. Three weeks ago, shortly before the voices began, she had discovered her husband Herv was having an affair with that silicone-enhanced slut Betsy Winters in Apartment 33-B. Furious, she had given him an ultimatum: either he ended the affair or their marriage was over. Unfortunately, Herv had chosen the latter option. He had left to move in with Betsy the same night, and had served Marjorie with the divorce papers the morning after. Now, after sixteen years of marriage, she found herself alone and abandoned. She was forty years of age, with her good looks only a dim and distant memory. Maybe the doctor was right. Maybe it was stress that was causing her to hear the voices. No matter how many pills she took, the hubbub of voices in her head continued regardless.

Only fifty-nine credits for a limited edition scale model of the Statue of Judgement? Boy, these home shopping networks are great! I'd better get on the vid-phone and order one before they run out of stock!

On and on and on; her head was throbbing. She heard hundreds of different voices, all chattering away at once in a never-ending stream of inanities. It had been weeks since she had had a proper night's sleep. Sometimes, it felt as if she was hearing the private thoughts of every person in the block around her, but that was impossible. She wasn't psychic. She was Marjorie Kulack, soon to be divorced and fast approaching middle age, her life falling apart like ashes in her hands, a woman on the edge, driven to

the brink of a complete breakdown by the endless jabbering of the voices in her head.

It was only a matter of time before she snapped.

ELEVEN

THE HELIX CONNECTION

It began with an apparent breakthrough.

"Mr Mortimer will see you now," the secretary said as she ushered them into a plushly furnished office. Her manner was smooth and unruffled, as though it was an everyday occurrence for a couple of Judges to come calling on her boss. Inside, a handsome middle-aged man sat behind a huge and imposing desk. Looking up from a comp-terminal as they entered the room, he stood and stretched forward his hand.

"Douglas Mortimer, CEO of HelixCorp Pharmaceuticals," he said with a smile. He looked at their badges. "You must be Judges Weller and..." Noticing the Psi Division insignia on her badge, he paused, "A Psi-Judge?"

"Anderson," she told him.

"Anderson?" The expression on Mortimer's face shifted almost imperceptibly. "Yes, of course. I've heard of you... I mean, who hasn't? It's just... You'll have to forgive my surprise, but when I was told two Judges had come here seeking information, I wasn't aware that the matter was so high profile."

"It's not." Weller was brusque. After seeing the news crews waiting for them as they arrived at the Melanie Arnwold crime scene, he seemed to greet the words 'high profile' with particular disdain. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. We're simply following a line of inquiry in an entirely routine investigation."

"Alarmed?" Waving a hand, Mortimer batted the concept away, "Not at all." He indicated a pair of chairs in front of his desk. "Please, won't you both sit down?"

It had started with a call from Central Control regarding the details on each victim that Med-Judge Noland had been forwarding to MAC for analysis ever since the investigation had become a serial case. By comparing their names to every computer database in the city, MAC had discovered that the victims had all been covered by a private medical insurance policy with HelixHealth - a wholly-owned subdivision of a major pharmaceutical megacorp based in Mega-City One called HelixCorp.

Now, Anderson and Weller had journeyed to HelixCorp's corporate headquarters for more information. They might have expected their

inquiries to be palmed off on some middle management functionary, but instead their request for information had been directed into the office of the top dog himself - Douglas Mortimer, the company CEO. Granted, this was Mega-City One, where you could achieve a lot more with a few kind words and a Judge's badge than you could with just a few kind words. All the same, the CEO's willingness to deal with such an apparently minor matter set alarm bells ringing distantly inside Anderson's head. The whole thing smacked of a guilty conscience.

"Can I ask Hilary to get you anything? Some synthi-caf, perhaps? Or some other beverage?" Seeing both Judges shake their heads, Mortimer dismissed the secretary before taking a seat once more. "Thank you, Hilary. Hold my calls, will you. If we need anything else, I'll let you know."

"I must admit, I'm surprised that you agreed to see us," Anderson said as the secretary left the office and closed the door. She wanted to test Mortimer's reactions, to ascertain whether he gave any indication of guilt or evasion. "As Judge Weller said, this is an entirely routine inquiry."

"Yes. Well, frankly, we do a lot of work for the Justice Department here at HelixCorp." Mortimer gave her another smile. "Particularly with your Med Division. That being the case, I wanted to ensure you had every help in your investigation." The smile grew broader, as though he was delivering the end of year results at some shareholders' meeting. "Now, please, how can I help?"

"We're following a lead on a series of killings that have all involved people who had insurance with HelixHealth," Weller told him.

"Killings? You mean murders? Why, that's just terrible," Mortimer shook his head sadly. "But I can't see how their membership of HelixHealth could have any bearing. It's strictly a medical insurance program run for the benefit of HelixCorp employees and their families. I have a policy myself. It's one of the perks that comes with working for the company." His brow furrowing in thought, he paused for a moment. "Of course, if you could give me the names of the people concerned, I can compare them with the records in our database."

Pulling a data-crystal from his belt, Weller handed it to Mortimer. Then, while the Judges waited, Mortimer slotted the crystal into his comp-terminal and used the keyboard to scroll through the information as it appeared on-screen.

"Hmm-hmm." Typing something into the keyboard, Mortimer waited as the screen changed, and then turned to the Judges once more. "Yes, I've checked the database. According to our records, all the names you've given me are people who qualified for discount rates on a HelixHealth policy by having a parent who once worked for HelixCorp. At first glance, I can't see anything else here that might help you. Their policies were all up-to-date. If you wish, I can print you out a copy of their medical records."

"We'll need that," Weller said to him. "Along with everything you've got on HelixHealth, its policy holders, budgets, and anything else you may have in your records. A Tek-Judge will also be arriving in the next few minutes to analyse your computer system at source. This is an open Justice Department investigation. Until it is closed, we expect every assistance."

"Of course, you do realise, that's potentially a *lot* of information." His hands returning to the keyboard, Mortimer pressed a button and checked something on the screen. "The latest figures at my disposal indicate HelixHealth has over forty-five thousand policy holders."

"You said the victims all qualified for medical insurance because their parents worked for HelixCorp?" Anderson asked him. "But we know they were all forty years of age. Surely it's unusual to continue offering discount rates to employees' children long after they've grown up and become adults?"

"Unusual?" Mortimer smiled broadly at her once more. Again, she had the sense that it was a smooth and polished façade. "At other companies perhaps, but not here at HelixCorp. Every time a new employee starts, we tell them that once they join HelixCorp they and their children are covered by our medical insurance for life. As I say, it's an additional perk that comes with the job. In the end, it's all about recruitment. Now most jobs are done by robots, recruiting the right calibre of people for the few human jobs that are left has become all the more vital. Schemes like HelixHealth help make us seem a more attractive employment prospect than our competitors. That in turn allows us to recruit only the most top-notch candidates to work for the company. Believe me, over the years it's been a policy that has paid more than its share of dividends. 'HelixCorp: recruiting the right people, with the right outlook.' It's one of our slogans."

"Uh-huh." Rising from her chair, Anderson indicated to Weller that they should leave, and turned to head towards the door. "Okay. I'd say that about covers everything. Don't worry about those printouts, the Tek can access the

data direct from your mainframe once he arrives. Thank you for your time. You've been a great deal of help."

"Don't mention it," Mortimer called after them as they left the office. "To use another one of our slogans: 'Here at HelixCorp we like to make life easy'."

"Are you out of your drokking mind?" Weller said to her a few minutes later, once they were out of earshot of Mortimer's office and moving towards the exit from the building. "What the hell were you doing ending the interview so early? There was no way that creep was on the up-and-up. Did you see the way he reacted when he saw you were a Psi-Judge? The drokker almost wet his pants."

"I saw it," Anderson replied. "That's why I read his mind while we were talking. I couldn't do a deep probe without making him suspicious, so I just read his surface thoughts. He's nervous, all right, but it has nothing to do with our investigation. It seems Mortimer neglected to report some minor share dealings on his most recent income tax assessment. That's why he was so keen to see us personally when he heard two Judges had arrived on the scene, he was afraid we were here to investigate him for tax evasion. From what I could read in his thoughts, he needn't have worried. I'll forward what I've learnt to the Accounts Division, but given the sums involved I'm not even sure failing to report the share dealings was actually a crime. It looks like Mortimer is just another citizen who gets overly nervous around Judges. It's the uniform, I guess. It may be designed to put the fear of Grud into perps, but it does the same for innocent citizens as well."

"What about the HelixHealth angle?" Weller asked her. They had reached the parking lot and were heading for their Lawmasters. "It's the first solid evidence we've come across of any kind of connection between the victims."

"Yeah, I was wondering about that myself." Climbing onto her Lawmaster, Anderson hit the ignition switch. "Maybe the killer has hacked into the HelixHealth database and he's using it to choose his victims? I figure we contact Tek Division and ask them to make sure the Tek they send checks the HelixCorp security logs to see if anybody has tried to break into their system recently. On top of that, I'd say they should compile a list of all the people who had access to the HelixHealth database and see if any of them have previous criminal convictions or a history of mental health

problems. It's a job for the Teks now. Rather than shuffling through paperwork or databases, I'd say you and me would be better off following other lines of investigation while the Tek Division sees what it can come up with."

"Other lines?" Mounting his own Lawmaster, Weller turned on the engine. "Right now we seem drokk out of leads. You've got any new ideas, Anderson, I'm open to suggestions."

"We could go back to the crime scene blocks," Anderson said to him. "You could re-canvass the neighbours while I perform a deep telepathic probe on the minds of the block supers. You remember I was saying maybe the killer had used his powers to influence the supers into taking the surveillance cameras off-line for maintenance? Maybe if we're lucky he hasn't covered his tracks as well as he thinks. Maybe, if I scan them, I'll be able to find some kind of remaining memory of the killer in one of the block supers' heads. You never know what we might be able to shake loose, either of us. Either way, it's got to be better than sitting around hoping that the Tek Division will do our job for us." She checked her watch. "I make it nearly midday. If our perp stays true to form, sometime after twenty-one hundred hours tonight he's going to kill a new victim. "That gives us about nine hours to find him and stop him before another innocent person dies."

A Psi-Judge! They sent a Psi-Judge. Sitting alone in his office once the Judges had left, Douglas Mortimer felt an icy hand of dread clutching at his heart. By now, they must know everything! Any minute, they'll come back in through that door and tell me I'm under arrest.

"So that's the famous Psi-Judge Anderson? I'd heard she was attractive, but, really, the holo-pictures I've seen hardly do her justice."

Turning at the sound of an arrogant and sardonic voice behind him, Mortimer saw a thin, blond-haired man in an immaculately tailored grey suit emerge through a side door connecting to an ante-room adjoining his office.

"Carlyle?" There was an edge of panic in Mortimer's voice. "You heard them? They wanted to know about HelixHealth. You said this wouldn't happen. You said-"

"Of course I heard it." Turning away, Carlyle moved to a drinks cabinet lifted out a bottle of synthi-whiskey and filled two glasses. "If you remember, I did warn you that the Judges might well come to see you, and I

told you that if it happened I would deal with it, which is exactly what I have done."

"But they sent a Psi-Judge. They were here at least ten minutes. She could have-"

"Read your mind?" Smiling, Carlyle took one of the drinks, brought it over to Mortimer and laid it on the desk before him. "Naturally, she tried it, but you needn't worry. I diverted the probe and made her think you were worried about some trivial and entirely fictitious misdemeanour." His lips rising in urbane amusement, the smile on Carlyle's face grew wider. Mortimer could not help noticing that the smile never seemed to reach his eyes. "Really, you should try to stay calm about these things, Douglas. You remember when we first met you asked me if I was good at dealing with problems? Well, I am. It's what you pay me for. Now, have a drink and stop worrying. Right now, everything is under control.

"I promise you, the Judges don't have any idea what is going on."

TWELVE

NIGHTFALLS & SILENCE

Nightfall: William Ganz's favourite part of the day.

The colours of the city seemed more vivid, revealed in all their true glories after the light of the dreadful and deceitful sun had passed around the Earth. Awakening refreshed from sleep and with a renewed sense of purpose, William dressed and went about his business. There were fourteen more names on the list in his head. Fourteen names, fourteen reds. Fourteen more killings and his deal with the Grey Man would be done. Walking the streets of the city and seeing the colours of the myriad soulshadows of the people all around him, William felt a familiar sense of excitement. Granted, the sleepwalking souls around him might not know it yet, but their city and their lives were his to do with as he willed. He was invisible. A ghost, he could come and go as he pleased. He would kill all the reds in Mega-City One, and then he would kill the reds in every other city of the world. And there was nothing the Judges could do to stop him.

Nightfall. He loved the night. It made him feel more virile, more vital, more manly. It quickened his pulse, the sights and sounds of the city around him carrying with them the promise of many more nights in his future. He knew he would experience a thousand more nights like this: hunting reds. It hardly seemed enough, but it was a start. With that happy thought in mind, he checked the details of the next name on the list inside his head.

Marjorie Kulack: Apartment 26-A, fifteenth floor, Sissy Spacek Block.

"Marjorie Kulack," he said the name aloud, whispering it to himself, savouring the way it sounded on his tongue. He felt the anticipation rise within him. Soon, he told it. Soon. He picked up his pace, walking more swiftly towards his destination as he saw Sissy Spacek Block in the distance.

A monster, eager to do his work.

Nightfall. For Marjorie Kulack, it had all just become too much.

It had started when the voices inside her head had suddenly grown louder. In place of a hundred voices, it now felt like she had a thousand or more people babbling in her mind at once. Her head was throbbing, pounding out a ruthless staccato beat of relentless torment. It was agony.

She felt like her skull was about to split open, spilling her brains out onto the lime green carpet covering her apartment floor. The pain was unbearable. Pulling herself to her feet, she rose from the sofa and stumbled towards her door. If she could make it to the pharmacy in the block plaza, she could buy some painkillers to mix with the antidepressants the doctor had given her. Opening the door, she staggered outside and saw her neighbour Mitzi Coltrane walk past her in the hallway.

Look at Marj Kulack, she suddenly heard a voice that sounded suspiciously like Mitzi's talking in her head. *Barely nine o'clock at night and she's drunk already. Guess she's been hitting the bottle hard ever since Herv finally saw sense and left her.*

"Why don't you shut the drokk up!"

Before she even knew what she was doing, Marjorie was screaming those words at Mitzi. She felt the pain inside her head ease by the smallest of fractions. It was as though by unleashing the pent-up frustrations inside her she had accidentally discovered a valve to relieve some of the pressure building in her head. It felt good. For the first time in weeks, Marjorie Kulack had finally found some relief.

Then, she looked down at her neighbour and saw what she had done.

Mitzi was lying like a broken rag doll at her feet. Her eyes were open and vacant and her slack mouth was drooling spittle. Spotting a wet and spreading puddle on the floor underneath Mitzi's body, Majorie realised that her neighbour had lost control of her bladder. Staring into Mitzi's eyes, she could see nothing of the spiteful and judgemental woman who had been her neighbour for close to twenty years. It was as though Mitzi was gone, replaced by a slobbering imbecile wearing her body like a suit of clothes.

I did this, Marjorie thought. I did this to her. For a moment she was caught up in the whirling maelstrom of her own emotions. She felt astonishment, fear, disbelief. Then, as quickly as they had come to her, the emotions passed. She looked down at Mitzi and realised that she felt no pity for this piss-stinking idiot bag of meat and bone that lay before her. She felt no remorse. She felt no regret. Mitzi Coltrane had always been an evil, sharp-tongued shrew of a woman. In the end, Marjorie had done nothing more than given her exactly what she deserved.

"You shouldn't have called me a drunk, Mitzi," Marjorie said, though it was plain enough that her neighbour could no longer hear her. "And you shouldn't have said those things about Herv."

It suddenly occurred to her that Mitzi had not actually said anything. Yet Marjorie had heard her voice clearly, albeit inside her head. With that thought came a revelation. Marjorie realised she had been wrong before. It looked like she was psychic, after all. The voices she heard in her head were the thoughts of her neighbours, the thoughts of all the people who lived in the block around her. For weeks now, she had been hearing other people's thoughts. Now, it seemed she had been granted a second psychic power. Now, as well as hearing what people were thinking, it seemed she could wipe their minds. Otherwise, how else was she to explain the fact that Mitzi was currently lying drooling in a pool of her own urine?

I did this, the thought flashed through her mind again. Where she had at first experienced astonishment, now she felt the growing smugness that comes with the sure knowledge of absolute power. I did this to her. I made Mitzi into a moron. Hell, the stupid bitch was already one to begin with. All I did was shut her up once and for all.

For a moment she paused to listen to the voices. Inside her head it was the same old, same old. She heard people thinking about their weight, or their love lives, or the love lives of the characters on the programmes they were watching on Tri-D. She heard people complaining inwardly about their vid-phone bills, moaning about the block super, and whining about the weather. In their heads, the residents of Sissy Spacek Block lusted and gossiped about their neighbours, passed judgements and made hateful comments. She heard their secret and private thoughts, their perversions and desires, all the things they kept in their own heads where they were sure that no one else could hear them. But Marjorie could hear them. She could hear them and she decided she had had enough. Turning to look at Mitzi Mittlelmeyer once more, she tried to tune into her thoughts and encountered only blessed silence. Whatever thoughts Mitzi had once harboured, they were now well and truly wiped clean.

Silence is golden, Marjorie thought to herself. Really, when you think about it, it would be so much better if the entire block was like Mitzi. Then, things would be quiet. Yeah. Silence is golden. I should wipe all of their minds: every person's in the block. Then, at last, I can get some rest.

Silence is golden. As she set off down the hallway to visit each of her neighbours in turn, the words had become a comforting mantra in Marjorie's mind. Silence is golden. Silence is golden. Silence is golden.

By the time anyone thought to call the Judges, Marjorie had brought silence to a dozen people, and she had barely even started.

Nightfall. For Cass Anderson, it felt like time was her enemy.

It had been a frustrating day. With Weller alongside her, she had visited four different blocks to perform a deep telepathic probe on the block supers in the hope that one of them might still maintain some shred of a memory of the killer. The results had been disappointing. If her theory was right and the killer had used his powers to persuade each super to take the cameras in their blocks offline, he had subsequently covered his tracks so well that Anderson had been unable to pick up his trail. Similarly, Weller's attempts to re-canvass the blocks in search of additional witnesses had turned up nothing.

Tek Division's trawl through the HelixHealth database had as yet failed to produce anything to help them. In their continuing analysis of the physical evidence left at the crime scene and on the victims' bodies, Yoakim and Noland had not managed to find any new leads. Earlier, Anderson had said the investigation was batting zero on every front. Now, it seemed they were at less than zero. If the case grew any colder, she would have to start wearing thicker gloves.

Grud, I feel like warmed-over three-day-old munce, she thought. Damn sleep machines. I don't care what the Teks say. Ten minutes in a machine is no replacement for a proper night's rest.

She was sitting on her Lawmaster outside the imposing entrance of Sector House 34, waiting for Weller. A short while ago, both she and the Street Judge had returned to the Sector House to undergo treatment in a Total Relaxation Inducer, or "sleep machine" as it was known to most Judges. Through some miracle of modern technology that Anderson did not even pretend to understand, ten minutes' rest in the machine was supposed to be the equivalent of eight hours' sleep. Generally, sleep machines were only used as an emergency measure when some crisis blew up and Judges had to work triple shifts to cope with it. Tonight, the knowledge that the killer was still out there and probably about to strike at any moment had caused Anderson and Weller to book a session each on the machine, in the hope of being able to continue their investigation on into the night.

Hearing the sound of an engine approaching, Anderson turned to see Weller emerge up the ramp from the Sector House's underground parking

bay. As he pulled alongside her, one look at his face told her that he felt as tired and ill-rested as she did. They were both running on empty, in more ways than one.

"Just finished talking to Control," Weller said. "Asked them to contact all the HelixHealth policy holders and tell them not to open their doors to any delivery men. Control said with forty-five thousand policy holders it would take too much manpower to contact them individually. They're sending them all automated vid-phone messages instead. Have to hope the next potential victim is somebody who checks their messages regularly."

"It probably won't work anyway," Anderson told him. "The killer's a teledominant. It doesn't matter what we tell people. If he tells them to open their doors, they'll do it."

"Had to try something," Weller grimaced. "I don't like thinking that creep's out there about to snuff some citizen and we can't do anything about it."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Right now it feels like we can't do much else but sit around and wait for the next victim. But the more I think about it, the more I think there has to be something we're missing. Something that could lead us right-"

"Control to Anderson." Her thoughts were interrupted by the sudden blare of her Lawmaster radio, Anderson took the call, expecting to be told that they were too late and the killer had already struck again.

"Anderson here, Control. Receiving. Over."

"Psychic incident at Sissy Spacek Block. Judges on the scene request urgent Psi Division backup. Sounds like they've got a rogue psychic on the loose. You're the closest, Anderson. Can you respond? Over."

For an instant she hesitated. Then, she noticed Weller looking at her.

"Take the call, Anderson," he said. "I'll continue the investigation alone until you can catch up. You said it yourself, right now we aren't doing much more than sitting around twiddling our thumbs."

"Confirmed on that, Control." With a quick nod to Weller, she called up a route map to Sissy Spacek on the screen of her Lawmaster computer and hit the accelerator to roar off into the night. "Judge Anderson responding. Current location is outside the Sector House. ETA to Sissy Spacek: ten minutes. "Tell the Judges on the scene I'm on my way."

THIRTEEN

BAD NIGHT AT SISSY SPACEK

Something was wrong at Sissy Spacek Block. Approaching the block forecourt along the De Palma pedway, William saw a scene of utter pandemonium happening in front of his eyes. There were Judges everywhere, busily shepherding confused and frightened residents away from the block, holding the gathering crowds of gawkers back; Med-Judges tending to apparently comatose victims and rushing them to waiting ambulances. The whole area around the block was crawling with Judges. Watching the unfolding drama from a safe distance, William felt a sudden seething annoyance build silently within him.

With so many Judges surrounding Sissy Spacek, there was no way he could go inside the block and start his work. He had promised himself he would begin the night with Marjorie Kulack. He had promised himself she would be his seventh victim. Now, courtesy of some previously unforeseen disaster, his plans lay in ruins. Admittedly, he could put Marjorie aside for the moment, go on to the next name on the list, and come back later after things had quietened down. Still, that was hardly the issue.

The Grey Man had been adamant that William should work through the names on the list in the precise order in which they appeared. It was part of their bargain. Besides which, what was the point of having a list full of people to kill if you just chose the names at random? The very idea of it offended William's own concept of order.

He felt stymied, frustrated, aggravated almost beyond his endurance.

Then, he saw her.

Sounding her siren as the crowd parted before her, a female Psi-Judge drove her Lawmaster towards the block and parked it on the forecourt. She was beautiful. Her flowing hair was long and blonde, her body lean and attractive beneath the intimidating exterior of her Judge's uniform. To William, though, it was the colour of her soul that was most compelling.

It was red, so very, very red.

In all the years of his life, he had never seen its like. The Psi-Judge's aura was a burning corona pulsating with resonant and dynamic shades of crimson and scarlet. It was so bright, so vibrant. It hurt his eyes to look at it. It was like staring at the sun. Even as he closed his eyes it seemed to burn

through his eyelids, transfixing him with its glare, its imprint scorched onto his retinas. He felt humbled, in awe. It was like a moment of religious awakening. In all the world, he had never known a human being could be so red. He felt a stabbing pain behind his eyes. He felt a terrible desire rising within him. He was like a moth to the flame. He wanted to draw nearer. He wanted to touch her, to kill her. He had to have her.

"Hey, you know, I think that's Judge Anderson," he heard a voice say among the crowd of bystanders standing nearby. "The Psi-Judge? I saw her on the Channel 109 news report this morning. You know, the one with that guy... What's-his-name?"

"Whatsisname?" another voice answered. "You mean the thin guy? Ralph something? Or is it Matt?"

"Yeah, anyway, they said she was working a serial killer case, right here in this very sector. I wonder if this whole commotion has got something to do with it?"

The conversation continued, but, already, William had stopped listening. In place of the idiot murmurings of the crowd, a single word whispered itself endlessly in his mind with a frenetic rhythm born of dawning obsession. *Anderson.* He liked the sound of it. *Anderson*. He had seen her. *Anderson.* He had her name now. *Anderson.*

Soon, he would have so much more.

"Vital signs are slow but normal," the Med-Judge said, as they stood beside a young woman drooling on a stretcher. "Pupils are unfocused but reactive. No sign of physical trauma or for that matter any physical symptom beyond the complete loss of bowel and bladder control. Patient is unresponsive. You ask her name or if she knows where she is, she just keeps staring into space. It's the same with the rest of them." He indicated the victims being loaded onto ambulances by other Med-Judges nearby. "It's like they don't even know we're here."

It had taken Anderson exactly ten minutes to reach Sissy Spacek Block after receiving the call from Control. Ten minutes, in which the situation had apparently grown worse. Arriving on the scene, Anderson had been instantly greeted with all the usual things she expected to see at a crisis in progress: Street Judges working crowd control in the block forecourt outside to give their fellow Judges inside the block the time and space they needed to try and contain the threat, Med-Judges tending to the victims, Tri-

D news crews jostling with their rivals from other stations as they attempted to find the perfect angle from which to shoot footage, and a growing crowd of gawkers as citizens unaffected by the crisis gathered to see what was going on.

Depending on how long the whole thing took to reach some kind of resolution, it was only a matter of time before the first of the licensed street hawkers arrived to sell newly printed "I Was At Sissy Spacek" T-shirts. As a Psi-Judge in Mega-City One, Anderson had seen the same drama play itself out more times than she cared to count.

"How many casualties so far?" she asked the Med-Judge.

"Fifteen, for sure." The Med-Judge's face was grim. "But for all we know, it could be twice that number. So far, the Street Judges have the psychic contained on the fifteen floor, but without Psi Division backup, the only thing they could do was establish a perimeter and try to evacuate the residents."

"Yeah, well, the backup's here now. Still, before I go one-on-one with a rogue psychic, I'd like to know what I'm up against."

Glancing down once more into the vacant staring eyes of the drooling young woman on the stretcher, Anderson removed her glove and pressed her hand to the woman's forehead. But as she attempted to scan the victim's memories, she found that they were missing. The woman's mind felt like a vast and barren void. Every trace of memory or personality was gone, wiped clean, leaving only a blank and empty slate behind.

"She's been mind-wiped," Anderson said. "Looks like our rogue psychic is a telepath, and a powerful one, given that he was able to wipe the victim's mind so completely. Feels like even her motor skills are gone. Sometimes the memories of mind-wipe victims can spontaneously regenerate, but I get the feeling that isn't going to be the case here. Chances are that the victim's condition will be permanent."

"*She*," the Med-Judge said. When Anderson raised an eyebrow at him, he continued. "A couple of eyewitnesses have tentatively identified the psychic as a block resident. Marjorie Kulack. I thought the name might be helpful, you know, in case you had to try to talk her down."

"Yeah, I figured it would be at that." Anderson glanced up at the block building beside them. "All right, the fifteenth floor, you said? Ask Control to radio to the Judges up there and tell them to maintain their perimeter. We've got enough casualties already: we don't want some hotshot fresh

from the Academy getting turned into a basket case because he tried to grab himself some glory. I'll bring her down alone." She turned and walked towards the block.

"Either that, or I'll end up having to get myself fitted for a new set of diapers."

As the elevator doors opened it soon became clear that the fifteenth floor was all but deserted. Drawing her Lawgiver pistol as she stepped out into the corridor, Anderson saw that the majority of the doors of the apartments on either side of her were already open. In a city whose citizens showed an almost religious devotion to keeping their homes locked and bolted for fear of intruders, it was an unsettling sight. She found herself hoping it meant most of the residents had fled when the rogue psychic first went on the rampage. Equally, she was aware that there was probably a more sinister explanation. A corridor full of open doorways probably meant that the psychic had gone door-to-door, leaving a trail of mind-wiped victims in the apartments behind her. If that was the case, it only made the need to subdue her all the more urgent.

Careful, Cass, Anderson told herself. You don't want to get ahead of yourself here by thinking of the victims. Marjorie Kulack could be anywhere. You have to take it slow and careful - go apartment by apartment if you have to, until you find her. You rush it and you could walk right into an ambush. Baby steps, Cass, baby steps. Go slow and careful.

Despite her own good counsel, Anderson began to wonder if there was a way to shorten the process: a way to find the psychic sooner rather than later, before she had the chance to claim more victims. It occurred to her that if she opened herself to the psi-flux she might be able to detect the ripples in the flux's currents caused by Marjorie Kulack's apparently phenomenal psi-talent and home in on them. In theory it could work, the only drawback being that by tuning in to the psi-flux she would have to risk briefly losing her awareness of the physical world around her. There would be a certain dark irony to it if, having entered the psychic world to track Marjorie Kulack's psi-talent, Anderson instead found the woman lurking around a corner in the physical world waiting to brain her with an entirely mundane weapon like a metal bar. Risky or not, given the situation, Anderson did not see that she had any other choice.

She heard a scream.

Recognising it as a man's voice crying out in pain, Anderson hurried towards the sound. Turning a corner in the corridor, she realised that the scream was coming from an apartment whose closed door stood out in marked contrast to the other open doorways around it. Slowing her pace, she approached the door cautiously from the side as, inside the apartment, the screaming ended and she heard voices raised in conversation.

"Did you like that, Herv?" A woman's voice, bitter and vengeful. "That's the pain I felt when I was seven years old and my brother accidentally slammed my fingers in the door. At least, he *said* it was an accident..."

"Marj, please-" A man's voice, pleading, desperate.

"They say you don't remember pain," the woman's voice cut him off. "I saw a doctor talking about it once on Tri-D. He said we remember the incidents where pain occurred, but not the actual sensation of pain itself. Not me, though. Not anymore. Now, I can perfectly remember the sensation of every pain I ever felt. What's more, I can transmit the memory of it to you without even touching you. Pretty good, don't you think? And I've got plenty of stored-up pain I want you to enjoy, Herv, The time I broke my ankle tripping down the stairs, the time I cut my hand open with the munce-slicer when I was preparing your dinner. Most of all, I want you to feel every moment of the pain I felt when you left me for Betsy Winters and her plasteen tits. You'll find out soon enough, Herv that that was the worst pain of all."

"Marj... Please... I'm sorry..."

"Sorry?" The woman's voice rose, becoming more strident. "Sorry for what, Herv? Sorry for banging that slut behind my back? Sorry for leaving me? Or just sorry 'cause you realise it's time for payback. I'll make you sorry, Herv. I'll make you sorry you were ever born!"

Hearing the man's voice scream once more, Anderson kicked the door open and pushed into the apartment with her Lawgiver at the ready.

"Anderson! Psi Division!" she shouted as she burst into the apartment. "Marjorie Kulack, you are under arrest."

Inside, taking the scene in with a glance, Anderson saw a florid-faced woman in a shapeless smock standing over a man tied to a chair. The difference in their physical sizes was disproportionate: the woman was tall and heavily built, while the man's skinny frame and lack of stature were emphasised by the fact that he was naked except for a posing pouch and a pair of socks. Nearby, Anderson caught a glimpse of a second woman in the

corner of the room, lying curled in a foetal position on her side and apparently unconscious.

"A Judge? Oh sweet Grud, thank you!" Struggling vainly against his bonds, the man called out to Anderson. "Help me! She's crazy, Judge. She hurt Betsy. Help me."

"No!" Beside him the tall woman screamed out in anger and defiance. Anderson felt a powerful wave of psychic force surge through the psi-flux towards her. Raising her psychic defences to counter it, she felt the woman's attack crash against the barrier. The ferocity of the assault was almost overwhelming. It was as though Marjorie Kulack was releasing all her inner reservoirs of rage and pain in a continuous and brutal storm akin to some form of psychic hurricane. Her defences beginning to crack under the strain, it was all Anderson could do to hold her own. Suddenly, she felt a distant pain in her ankle, and then another pain joined it in her left hand. Marjorie's psychic assault was starting to break through. Concentrating hard, Anderson pushed more of her resources into maintaining her psychic shield, shoring up her defences and trying to prevent Marjorie's attack from reaching her in earnest.

"Pretty bitch!" Turning towards a nearby lamp, Marjorie grabbed it and smashed it against the side of a table. Then, picking through the debris for a long jagged piece of plasteen, she advanced towards Anderson with murder in her eyes. "You think I ain't seen your kind before? The world is full of pretty bitches who think they can take whatever they want! But not this time! This time, frumpy old Marjy is going to kill a pretty bitch."

Fighting to take careful aim as the psychic storm emanating from the woman continued, Anderson flicked the selector switch on her Lawgiver to stun-shot. She pulled the trigger, unleashing a bright pulse of energy carrying tens of thousands of volts of electricity from the barrel of the gun into Marjorie's body. Incredibly, the woman kept coming.

"Pretty bitch!" she heard Marjorie shouting to herself, the psychic storm around her growing more intense. "Pretty bitch! Pretty bitch! Pretty bitch!"

Barely believing that the woman was able to maintain the psychic assault, and attack physically at the same time, never mind shrugging off a stun shot, Anderson fired another pulse. Still, Marjorie continued her relentless advance. She fired again. The repeated pulses barely seemed to have any effect. Majorie was coming closer. In a split second, Anderson would be within range of Marjorie's makeshift knife. She needed to make a

decision. The woman's eyes were mad and staring, boiling with incoherent hatred. Anderson heard her shouting "pretty bitch" over and over again. Barely able to withstand the continuing psychic assault, Anderson realised that if it came to a hand-to-hand fight with Marjorie, she would be as good as dead. She thought of Marjorie's former husband, tied to the chair. She thought of the unconscious woman lying curled in the corner. She thought of all the other victims Marjorie would claim if someone did not stop her. She saw Marjorie lift the jagged piece of plasteen, ready to strike. The decision was made. It was now or never. Anderson had no choice.

Switching the ammunition selector on her Lawgiver to execution rounds, she pulled the trigger.

FOURTEEN

THE SEVENTH VICTIM

"It shouldn't have happened," Anderson said afterwards as she walked out of the block onto the forecourt.

"You can't blame yourself," a Street Judge called Crosetti said as he walked out beside her. Anderson had met him immediately after Marjorie Kulack's death, as the Street Judges inside the block advanced to secure the scene in the wake of the crisis. "You didn't have any other choice. It had to be done. Last I heard, the Med-Judges were saying the casualty count was up to thirty-three. Grud knows how many other people the Kulack woman would have mind-wiped if you hadn't stopped her."

"I know." She nodded sadly. "Believe me, I've gone through all the justifications in my own head already. Not that it makes much difference."

Pausing to look at Crosetti for a moment as she reached the part of the forecourt where her Lawmaster was parked, Anderson was struck by the fact that he seemed unusually sympathetic for a Street Judge. Upstairs, while Herv Kulack had sat tied half-naked to a chair and the other Judges had smirked at his predicament, Crosetti had cut the man free at once and fetched a blanket to cover him up. A small gesture of kindness perhaps, but in a city where Judges so often showed a callous disregard for any human emotion it revealed him as a breed apart.

"Still, that wasn't what I meant," Anderson continued. "When I said it shouldn't have happened, I was talking about this entire situation. One of the reasons the Justice Department runs screening programs to identify potential psychics is to stop things like this from happening. Yet, somehow, Marjorie Kulack seems to have slipped through the net."

"Maybe she was good at hiding her psi-talent?" Crosetti suggested. "Or maybe, until recently, her powers were only latent. I hear the screening procedure can have a hard time detecting psychics if they're tested before their powers have manifested for the first time."

"She was a latent, all right. I got the feeling she was only just learning to use her psi-talent, as though it had just manifested in the last few days. That's a strange enough thing in itself. Usually a psychic's powers appear in childhood or early adolescence, but Marjorie Kulack was forty years old.

It's virtually unheard of for a person that age to suddenly wake up one day and discover she has psychic powers."

"There could be a drug angle," Crosetti said. "Some idiot tries to create a new designer narcotic and ends up mixing a batch of psi-booster by mistake. Then, he sells it on the street to the wrong customer and *boom* - instant psi-powers."

"Sure, it could happen," Anderson agreed. Mounting her Lawmaster, she realised she needed to get back to the case she was supposed to be working on with Weller. By her watch it was 22.00. If the serial killer was still following his usual pattern, he could have killed another victim already tonight. "But the ingredients used to make psi-booster are so heavily controlled it's hard to envision an underworld chemist being able to get hold of them, much less mix up a psi-booster by mistake." She shook her head. "I don't know. I guess we'll have to wait and see if anything shows up when the Med-Judges do the tox-screen on her body. Take care of yourself, Crosetti." Shaking hands with the Street Judge, she started her Lawmaster and pulled out of the forecourt. For the moment, she had done all she could at Sissy Spacek. It was time to rejoin Weller and get back to the hunt.

Somewhere, out in the night, a killer was waiting.

He found the female Judge standing alone on the pedway at the side of the block forecourt, away from all the commotion. Approaching her, William saw a glimpse of blonde hair at her collar, peeking out from under the rim of her helmet. He moved closer, feeling a familiar excitement rising within him.

"Excuse me? Judge?" As she turned towards him, William smiled. "I saw some juves hanging around down there." He pointed to the shadowy alleyway between two blocks. "They were smoking cigarettes. I thought I should report it."

"You did well, citizen," she said. Her hand went to activate the comm-link hidden inside her helmet. "I'm working perimeter duty here, but I'll radio it in and-"

"No," William's voice was forceful. "You don't need to radio anyone. You can handle the juves yourself. Come with me now and I'll show you where they are."

Her hand falling, the Judge walked into the alleyway with William beside her. Then, once they were halfway along it, William told her to stop.

"Take your helmet off and turn to face me." As the Judge followed his instructions, he saw a cascade of golden hair fall free across her shoulders. "That's it. Now, lift your chin up. Higher." He reached for the knife inside his coat. "Higher. There's a good girl. Just a little bit higher and, soon, it will all be over..."

Pulling out the knife, he struck with one fluid motion, the blade unleashing a bright spray of arterial blood as it slashed through her throat. Her glazed eyes suddenly snapping to awareness as she registered what was happening to her, the Judge's hand reached down to draw the Lawgiver from her boot holster. But it was already too late. Losing her balance as her knees abruptly weakened, her forward motion caused her to fall against William. Pushing her back against the alley wall, William propped the woman up as the blood continued to seep from her throat, their bodies held briefly together like courting lovers in the midst of an illicit rendezvous. In seconds, it was over. The woman's eyes clouded and became distant, a last sigh escaping her lips as she breathed her last. Her aura faded. It was finished.

Afterwards, as he released the Judge's body to let it fall to the ground, William experienced a rush of disappointment. When he had seen the woman standing alone and unprotected he had succumbed to temptation, hoping that by killing her he might be given some release from the frustration churning inside him. But it had not worked. The woman was only a humble Street Judge. The badge on her chest read "Wilkerson", not "Psi Division". She was not a Red. In life, the colours of her aura had been blue and indigo. He felt no contentment. The same need that had burned within him when he first saw her still burned on regardless of her death. Worse, he realised that in killing her he had made a mistake.

For all he knew the Justice Department's surveillance cameras might well have recorded him talking to the Street Judge and leading her into the alley. Once the other Judges discovered that one of their own was missing, they would scour the streets to find him. William would have to flee the area, returning to hide in his lair as he waited to see whether the Judges' manhunt succeeded in bringing them to his door. Even if he had made a lucky escape and none of the cameras had seen enough of his face to be able to track his movements through the city, an entire night would have been wasted.

I shouldn't have killed her, William thought, looking down at the dead Judge as he stood beside her. She wasn't the one I wanted. I only picked her

because I saw her hair and it reminded me of the one I really wanted to kill: the Psi-Judge. I couldn't get to her and so I killed another woman instead, a woman who wasn't even a Red. That was stupid.

Chiding himself for his foolishness as he cleaned the blade of his knife and put it back inside his coat, William turned towards the mouth of the alleyway to head back to his lair. Briefly, he wondered whether he should flee to another sector, find a new lair and try to lie low until the heat cooled off. He quickly rejected the idea. For all he knew, the Judges were already on his trail. If he had to face them it would be better to do it on home ground. After all, he knew his lair intimately. As far as William was concerned, there could be no better place for him to have to meet an army of Judges. He would not let them take him easily. Certainly, he would not let them take him alive, not when they might put him back in the institution. William would rather die than allow that to happen.

Emerging from the alleyway, he turned and set off at a brisk pace along the pedway. As he did, he thought of Marjorie Kulack and the annoyance he had felt when he had arrived at Sissy Spacek Block to see there were Judges all around it. Now, the emotion had passed. Everything had changed in the instant that he had first seen the Psi-Judge. Before that moment, all he had wanted to do was kill reds, any reds, irrespective of their names or who they were. Now, things were different. Now, his life had been given an entirely new focus. Granted, he still wanted to kill reds, but he no longer cared about his bargain with the Grey Man and all the names on the list. All that was behind him. The bargain, the list - they no longer mattered. There was only one name on William's list now.

Anderson.

FIFTEEN

A MEETING WITH WILLIAM GANZ

"Say that again, Control?" Weller said. He had been parked up for a meal break, enjoying the dubious pleasures of a Munce-Burger Royale with Synthi-Cheese, when he had received the call. Now, the news he had just heard was almost enough to make him spill his soy-cola. "I want to be sure I heard you right."

"I said we've maybe got a line on your perp," Control replied. "I received the results of the surveillance analysis you ordered from Gunderson at PSU. By analysing the footage from the exterior cameras at each crime scene, he managed to isolate a single suspect who is recorded as being in the vicinity of the blocks in question at or around the time that each of the victims was killed. The bad news is that none of the shots of the suspect's face are clear enough to permit his identification. However, by tracking his movements over the last two nights through the PSU archives, Gunderson thinks he has identified the neighbourhood where the perp lives. What's more, early this morning somebody went into a pharmacy just outside that neighbourhood and filled a prescription for Zirovanifex. It's a viral antibiotic used to kill the bacteria that cause wound infections, including the kind of bacteria you get in human bite wounds. We're interrogating the doctor who wrote it, but so far he denies all knowledge of the prescription."

"This neighbourhood," Weller felt his pulse quicken."Where is it?"

"Trinity Heights," Control said. "It used to be the most exclusive neighbourhood in the entire sector, until it got hit hard by a Sov tac-nuke during the Apocalypse War. It's been derelict ever since. Oh, and there's radiation advisory on that whole area. The roentgen count isn't hot enough for you to need a rad-cloak, but you're advised to take anti-radiation pills every two hours. If your perp wanted to find a place in Mega-City One where he could be alone, he couldn't have picked a better spot."

Considering it had once been known as an exclusive address, Trinity Heights had come a long way downhill. Turning his Lawmaster onto a skedway that led through the heart of what was formerly a prosperous neighbourhood, Weller was confronted by an eerie landscape of devastation.

On either side of him he could see the burnt-out shells and empty windows of the con-apt buildings that had been destroyed when the nuke had hit.

According to the information he had gleaned from his Lawmasters computer on the way over, the fuse of an incoming warhead had been damaged when it was struck in flight by a laser blast from a City-Def anti-missile battery. Instead of exploding in an airburst that might well have wiped out the entire sector, the warhead had only detonated after it had hit the ground at City Bottom three kilometres westward. Sadly, for the residents of Trinity Heights it made little difference. Enveloped in the searing heat of a nuclear firestorm, the ashes of their bodies had long ago blown away in the wind, leaving only the scorched and ruined buildings of the scene before him as a lingering testament to their passing.

Grud, you forget just how bad the Apocalypse War really was, Weller thought, his mood made sober by the destruction. I was barely out of the Academy when it happened. Maybe I was lucky. When you're young, you're an optimist. Even after the worst disaster you think things will eventually get better, but by the time you get older, you realise that that never happens. Things don't get better. They only get worse.

Suppressing a shiver as his memory was stirred to thoughts of Necropolis, by the sights around him, Weller tried to concentrate on the mission ahead. He knew he was taking a dangerous gambit coming alone to a desolate wasteland in search of a killer. Worse, if Anderson was right and the killer was psychic, Weller might well be about to grab hold of more trouble than he could handle. Procedure said he should contact Anderson at once. Not only would she be more able to deal with the killer's powers, her own psychic abilities might make it easier to track him down.

Despite this, Weller found that he simply could not bring himself to do it. He realised he was being irrational. He realised he was putting his own life at risk, but having spent the best part of the last twenty-four hours in Anderson's company, he felt relieved that he no longer had to put up with her riding beside him. It might not be the Psi-Judge's fault, but in the end he simply could not forgive her for being a psychic.

No, he thought as he brought his Lawmaster to a halt beside the crumbling and fire-blackened walls of what might once have been a restaurant. I don't care what procedures say. I've made my decision. I don't need Anderson's help on this one. I'll find the perp without her. And I'll bring him in on my own.

There was only one problem, it occurred to him as he gazed at the maze of ruins, debris-strewn streets and mounds of rubble all around him. If he was going to search out the perp in this wasteland and bring him in, where the hell did he start looking?

William was on his way back to his lair when he saw him. Turning a corner as he walked the deserted streets of Trinity Heights, he saw a Judge standing beside a Lawmaster parked on the roadside ahead, and felt an electric surge of fear. His mind racing with question, William scrambled to take cover in the ruins of a burnt-out building before the Judge could spot him. How had the Judges managed to track him down so fast? Were they watching him already, somewhere out in the darkness of the night, waiting to arrest him? Was Anderson with them? Would he have a chance to kill her before the others grabbed him? Then, suddenly, he noticed something that caused him temporarily to abandon his line of questions.

The Judge was alone.

Confused, for a moment William thought he must be mistaken. Surely the Judges would not send only a single man to bring him in. He was a monster. He had killed one of their own. Surely, if they had discovered that he lived in Trinity Heights, they would bring every weapon in their armoury to bear against him: H-Wagons, Manta tanks, Spy-in-the-Sky cameras, Lawmaster bikes. From what he had seen in his short time in the city, the resources at Justice Department's disposal were formidable.

Yet here he was, hiding in the rubble while a single Judge stood out in plain sight on the roadway ahead. More questions were raised than answered. Was the Judge lost? Was he waiting for someone? William's heart suddenly skipped a beat as it occurred to him that the Judge's presence might well be a trap. Perhaps they thought he had killed the female Street Judge simply because she was a Judge, and had sent out another lone Judge to trap him. Perhaps this Judge was bait? William was not quite sure what to think. Frankly, he found the entire situation completely baffling.

Cautiously moving to a more comfortable vantage from which to observe the Judge in safety, William waited with bated breath. As the minutes passed, he found himself increasingly reassured that his earlier conviction had been correct. The Judge was alone. If other Judges had been hiding anywhere in the vicinity, William would have been able to see the colours of their soulshadows sparkling from afar in the night. As it was, the only

soulshadow he could see belonged to the Judge in the roadway. Agitated shades of yellow, brown and blue, outlined with spider's web traces of black. It was the aura of a man ill at ease with himself, a man whose mind was slave to secret torments. At the same time, William could see nothing in it to suggest the anxiety he would have expected if the Judge was waiting as bait in a trap. Watching the Judge's head turn to scan the ruined landscape around him as the man paced a wide circle across the skedway, William became convinced that the Judge was caught on the horns of some internal dilemma. It was as though the Judge was about to start searching for something, but was unsure exactly where to begin.

You're searching for me, Judge, William thought to himself, aren't you? Staring at the man, he smiled. Too bad, 'cause you'll never find me. This is my home-ground, not yours. Trinity Heights is a big place. All I've got to do is stay out of your way for a while, and eventually you'll get tired and give up.

Then, just as he was about to skirt through the rubble around the Judge and continue on his way to his lair, William had second thoughts. An appealing new idea suddenly occurred to him. After he had made the mistake of killing the woman Street Judge, it had seemed to him that he had wasted an entire night. Now, the Judge's presence on his home ground might well have presented him with a golden opportunity to get his work back on track. The Judge might be exactly the thing William needed to help him achieve a deeply held ambition.

After all, there was more than one way to use a Judge as bait...

"Excuse me, Judge?" As he stood on the skedway pondering his next move, Judge Weller heard a voice behind him. "I was hoping maybe you could help me?"

Turning at the sound, his hand going for his Lawgiver, Weller found himself standing face-to-face with a young citizen in a black overcoat.

"Freeze!" Weller barked as he levelled the Lawgiver. Even without the fact that he wore an overcoat the same as the killer's, a citizen wandering around a rad-pit in the middle of the night was automatically cause for suspicion. "Keep your hands where I can see-"

"Drop the pistol." Hearing the forceful tone of the command, Weller abruptly realised that he was facing the killer. There was something in his

voice, something that compelled Weller to obey him. Appalled, he saw his own hand open to release his Lawgiver and let it fall to the ground.

"Stay still," the killer said. There was no resisting his voice. With every word out of the man's mouth, Weller knew that he would do whatever he was told. "You will not try to attack or hurt me. You will not try to use your radio. You will not run. You will answer all of my questions truthfully. Do you understand me?"

"Yes. I understand." The words seemed to force their way up from between Weller's lips as though the perp's every question demanded an answer.

"Good. Tell me, do you know Psi-Judge Anderson?"

"Yes. I know her." He gritted his teeth, trying to hold the words inside, but it was no good. He was slave to every nuance in the killer's words. Weller was horrified to realise that his own brain was acting against him by responding to the perp's instructions in a direct and non-evasive manner. He was no genie in a bottle, craftily interpreting his master's orders to his own advantage. No, the perp had told him to answer truthfully. That was precisely what Weller did, helpless to offer anything but the complete, unvarnished truth. "I'm working a case with her: your case. We're investigating the murders you committed."

"Really?" the perp said. He seemed delighted. "That's perfect. Her knowing you just makes everything so much better."

Falling deep in thought, the perp fell silent for a moment. In that silence, Weller tried to find a way out of his predicament. He was still wearing his daystick and bootknife and his Lawgiver lay on the ground by his feet. But no matter how hard he tried to make his hands reach for his weapons, they would not obey him. Desperately, his mind ran through his options as he attempted to find a loophole in the perp's instructions. He could not run. He could not attack the perp. He could not lie to him and try to trick him. An idea occurred to him. He could still speak, and his Lawmaster was only a few metres away...

"Lawmaster!" Weller shouted suddenly, trying to get the command out before the perp could stop him. "Emergency protocol zero-"

"Shhhh." Putting his fingers to his lips, the perp hushed him softly and the words died on Weller's tongue. For a moment the perp smiled quietly again, and then he continued. "Your Lawmasters computer can follow your instructions, then? What were you going to tell it to do?"

"Return to base," Weller said. "When the lawmaster showed up at the Sector House without me, it would automatically trigger a Code Ninety-Nine Red."

"Code ninety-nine Red? What's that mean?"

"Judge down," Weller told him. "When a Code ninety-nine alert is issued, every Judge in the area drops what they're doing and responds to the call."

"Clever," the perp said. "Of course, they would have gotten here too late anyway." He paused again. "Still, I think it's better if we get rid of the lawmaster. What's the furthest part of the city from here?"

"MegSouth," Weller said. "By the South Wall."

"Tell your lawmaster to go there." The perp raised an admonishing finger. "Nothing else, you understand. Just tell it to go to the South Wall right away."

"Lawmaster!" Weller called out the command. "Engage autopilot. Destination: South Wall. Go now."

Its engine suddenly purring to life, the lawmaster began to move off down the skedway. With it, Weller realised his last chance for salvation was gone.

"Good," the perp said, taking a knife from inside his coat. "Now, open the tunic of your uniform."

Unable to resist, Weller released the hidden catch at the shoulder of his tunic and pulled down the zipper. Then, easing aside the heavy weight of the tunic with its concealed plasteen-armoured plates, he exposed his chest.

"There's something I want you to do for me, Judge," the perp said. Stepping closer to him, he turned to point with the blade of the knife down the opposite direction of the skedway to the one the lawmaster had taken. "Well, two things really. In exactly one minute's time, I want you to start walking north along the skedway. I want you to keep going until you are dead. But first, there's something else."

As the perp turned back to him, Weller felt a sharp and agonising pain just below his sternum as the perp stabbed him with the knife and twisted the blade.

"I want you to remember something for me, Judge." As Weller's body bent forward in shock and pain, he felt the perp move closer to whisper in his ear. "A single word, I want you to say it to yourself over and over so you'll remember it past your death. It's the place where I'll be waiting for

your partner, the Psi-Judge, when she tries to come and find me, the word that will lead her right to me."

He heard the killer whisper a single word. Even through the agony coursing through his body, it seemed to Weller that the perp had picked a strange word to ask him to remember. It was a word unlikely to lead anyone anywhere. A word that in Mega-City One was so common as to be almost meaningless.

Of all the words in the world, why did his killer want him to remember the word "block"?

SIXTEEN

FALLEN EAGLE

"At first I thought we thought it was a dump job," the Judge said. The name on her badge read "Loudon". "Then we saw the blood trail and traced it back along the skedway to Trinity Heights, three klicks away. It's an old rad-pit left over from the Apocalypse War. Looks like he walked the whole way here from there after the killer stabbed him. Grud knows how he did it though, after he'd lost so much blood."

"He always was a tough one," the Judge next to her said. His name was Dietz. His voice had a mournful tone. "Hard as nails. I worked with him on a few cases. Always the first through any door, and he wouldn't take any shit from perps. He was a real Judge. The kind you want at your back when things go drokk-shaped. This city will miss him."

They were standing on the hard shoulder of a skedway with Anderson, looking down on the body of a fallen Judge. It was Weller. He lay on his side with one of his arms curled beneath him, the tunic of his uniform open and the eagle insignia on his shoulder trailing in the dirt covering the rockcrete surface of the road. He had a wound in the middle of his chest, while a trail of blood ran past his body and south along the skedway. Following the end of the incident at Sissy Spacek, Anderson had asked Control to put her through to Weller so that they could compare notes on their investigation, only to be told that he had gone off-com and could not be reached. More than two hours later, the mystery of the Street Judge's whereabouts had finally been resolved.

"Who found him?" she asked.

"I did," Loudon answered. "I was on patrol when I spotted something on the hard shoulder, drove over to investigate, and found him lying here, dead. It was too late to put out a Code Ninety-Nine Red for him, so I called Control requesting a Tek-team. They said they'd contact you as well, seeing as you were both working a case together."

"What about that?" Dietz asked. "You think his death is connected? Like maybe he caught up with the perp you're after and the bastard got the drop on him."

"Could be," Anderson agreed. She looked down at Weller's body. The two of them had never exactly seen eye-to-eye on their investigation, yet she

was as sad to see him lying there as the two other Judges were. Hard case or not, Weller was a Judge. He was one of their own. After twenty years of service to the citizens of the Big Meg, his only reward had been a cold and ignoble death.

"Guess there's only one way we're going to find out what happened," Anderson sighed. She knelt beside the body, pulling off one of her gloves. "I'll have to scan him."

He feels every movement of the knife as the killer twists the blade in his chest. Smiling, the killer is whispering to him. A word. Something he wants him to remember. Something the killer wants to stay with him past his death. Something the killer says will draw the Psi-Judge to him...

"Block?" Loudon asked, while both she and Dietz looked at her in confusion. "That's the word the killer wanted Weller to remember? The word he said would lead you right to him?"

"Yeah, that's it," Anderson replied, as she stood gazing down at Weller's body in the aftermath of the psi-scan.

"But it doesn't mean anything." There was a look of frustration on Loudon's face. "There must be thousands of blocks in this city. How are you supposed to know which one he meant? Are you sure you didn't make some kind of mistake?"

"About the word, you mean?" Anderson shook her head. "No, I'm sure it's right. It came through loud and clear. Every step he took after he was stabbed, Weller was repeating the word to himself over and over, trying to remember it. I'm sure the word is 'block'. I just don't known what it means."

"Have you thought maybe it doesn't actually mean anything?" Dietz said. "Maybe the killer is just trying to pull your chain, send you on a wild goose chase."

"I won't say it's not a possibility," Anderson said. "All the same, my instincts tell me that isn't what's going on here. The perp was willing to kill a Judge to make sure I got his message. You've got to admit, that's one hell of a way of making your point."

"All right, I'll call it in then." Grimacing, Loudon's hand went to her helmet to activate her comm-link. "I'll ask Control to forward the details to MAC for analysis. From the blood trail, we know that Weller was probably stabbed somewhere in Trinity Heights. Maybe MAC can put the whole

thing together and come up with something." The grimace became more pronounced. "I wouldn't hold your breath though."

"Believe me, I won't be." She paused for a moment to take a last look at the body before her, and then turned her eyes to the two Judges. "In the meantime, I figure there's nothing more to be done here. Loudon, as the first Judge on the scene, the body is your responsibility until the Tek-team gets here. Dietz, you're with me."

"Where are we going?" the male Judge asked her.

"Trinity Heights." We know that's where the killer stabbed Weller. It could be he's still around there somewhere. Either way, we have more chance of picking up his tracks there than we do here."

Grud, Anderson thought afterwards, but that was a bad way to go. Poor Weller.

She was speeding down the skedway on her Lawmaster en route to Trinity Heights, with Dietz riding beside her. The skedway was all but deserted. After midnight the traffic in this part of the sector would usually be light, even if they weren't headed for a rad-pit. But while the sensation of the wind blowing through her hair and the power of the lawmaster beneath her would normally have brought with her a sense of freedom, Anderson's mood was melancholy as she replayed the results of her most recent psi-scan in her mind.

She had been economical with the truth earlier, telling the two Street Judges the bare facts of Judge Weller's death without dwelling overlong on the details. There had seemed little point in burdening them further. It was bad enough that a Judge had died, without relaying every moment of his final agonies to others. Weller had walked for three kilometres, pain coursing through his body, his uniform slick with his own blood.

Along the way, as the blood loss took its toll, he had stumbled and fallen dozens of times, each fall bringing with it new agonies. In the end, he had been reduced to crawling on his belly, compelled to keep moving by the killer's instructions. "I want you to keep going until you are dead," the killer had told him, the words given the power of holy writ by his psi-talent. Powerless to disobey him, Weller had followed his orders to the letter, experiencing further agonies because of it. She couldn't have told the other Judges that. It would only have made Dietz and Loudon angry and more eager to hunt down the killer. With one Judge dead already, Anderson knew

that now was the time to keep a cool head. Not least because, for all she knew, she and Dietz might well be about to ride into a trap.

Ahead, the surface of the skedway had become more uneven, the streetlights either side of it diminishing in number as they approached Trinity Heights. Soon, they had passed the last of the working streetlights and Anderson had to boost the power of her lawmasters headlamp to see where she was going. The helmet Dietz wore as a Street Judge was equipped with an infrared vision filter allowing him to see in total darkness, but following her lead he boosted his headlamps as well. Anderson had never worn a helmet; few Psi-Judges did. It was not simply a matter of comfort. Somehow, having to cope with the restricting confines of wearing a helmet seemed to interfere with her psychic powers, lessening her sensitivity. As they entered Trinity Heights proper, it occurred to Anderson that sometimes being able to lessen her powers a little might not be a bad thing.

Twenty years had passed since the people of Trinity Heights had died in the nuclear fire, but from the psychic impressions she could feel in the ruins around her it might as well have been yesterday. The entire landscape felt raw with echoes of pain and terror. Erecting her psychic defences as she tried to keep the combined emotions of the neighbourhood's long dead residents at bay, Anderson found herself wondering how many had died on that single brutal day in Trinity Heights. Tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? And how many millions more had died when Mega City One had retaliated against the attack?

Anderson had been part of the hand-picked squad of Judges that had seized control of an enemy missile silo to launch that retaliation. Granted she had not pushed the button herself, and in the madness of war the retaliation had seem justified, but she had blood on her hands, all the same. She had come to Trinity Heights to bring to justice a man who had brutally murdered six people - eight, counting Judge Weller and the unfortunate Lenny Kaspasian, but what about her? Whatever her reasons at the time, regardless of the fact that the enemy had attacked first and without warning, she had played a part in the deaths of millions. Who would bring her to justice?

"Control to Anderson." Her lawmaster radio squawked to life, intruding on her disturbing thoughts. She found the intrusion more than welcome.

"Anderson receiving, Control. Over."

"Just heard back from Tek Division regarding the investigation you ordered into the records of a company called HelixCorp. The Teks think they may have found something suspicious. It was well hidden in the files, but all your perp's victims had a parent who took part in some kind of medical trial for HelixCorp forty-one years ago. According to company records, the trial was for a new cancer vaccine that never made it past the testing stage. Like I say, it looks pretty suspicious, especially now that seven people whose parents took part in the trial have suddenly died in the last fourty-eight hours."

"Seven people?" Anderson asked. "You mean six, don't you? Unless there's been a new victim nobody told me about."

"Yeah, well that's where things get kind of spooky," the tone of the dispatcher's voice seemed to grow uncomfortable. "I don't know quite how to tell you this, Anderson, but a seventh person whose parent was in the HelixCorp trial died a few hours ago as the victim of a Judge-involved shooting: a woman by the name of Marjorie Kulack."

"Marjorie Kulack?" Anderson was aghast. "Holy Grud. You make it sound like you think I've been doing the killer's work for him."

"Nobody's saying that, Anderson, but you were the one who put forward the theory that the perp is a teledominant. Sector Chief Collins thinks it might be an idea if you come in to the Sector House until we can arrange to have another Psi-Judge perform a telepathic probe, just to be on the safe side."

"The safe side?" As they continued to ride through Trinity Heights, Anderson glanced at Dietz beside her. If the Street Judge could hear her conversation with Control, he gave no sign of it. "Are you telling me I've been relieved of duty?"

"No, not at all." From the sound of his voice, the level of the dispatcher's discomfort was rising. "It's just that Sector Chief Collins has requested that you-"

"The sector chief can make as many requests as he likes," Anderson cut him off. "You seem to forget I don't work for him. I'm Psi Division. That means that unless I hear from either the Chief Judge or Psi Division Chief Shenker ordering me to report for a psi-probe, I will continue to keep following leads on the case I'm working. With that in mind, you said the victims all had a parent who took part in this medical trial. How many

people are there in HelixHealth's records that fit the same criteria and were born in the year 2084?"

"Uh... Whose parent took part in the same test?" Apparently caught unawares by the sudden shift in the conversation, the dispatcher paused. "Twenty... No, wait... If we take out the seven who were killed, that leaves thirteen."

"I want you to track those thirteen people down and have them put in protective custody," Anderson told him. "No automated vid-phone messages. No whingeing about lack of manpower. I want those people protected by Judges, now. Then, when they're all in custody, I want them transferred to Psi Division Headquarters and taken down to Psi-Lab for testing."

"Psi-Lab? You think these people are psychics?"

"Could be. Marjorie Kulack certainly was. Call it an intuitive leap, but it seems to me that could be what this is all about. We've got six murder victims, a rogue psychic who first manifests her powers at the age of forty, and a pharmaceuticals company - all linked by medical tests forty-one years ago. Add in the fact that all the murder victims were also forty years of age. I'm guessing that when you talked about these people's parents, you actually mean their mothers."

"Uh... Yeah... I..." There was a pause again as the dispatcher checked his records. "Grud on a greenie, you're right! Hold on... The tests were forty-one years ago, and the victims were all forty years old? Are you telling me that you think HelixCorp experimented on their mothers when they were pregnant? But why?"

"Think about it," Anderson told him. "Psychics are a valuable resource with all kinds of military and commercial applications, and yet the percentage of people in the population who possess psychic powers is tiny. Imagine if you could find a way of actually breeding psychics from scratch. We're talking about a process that would be worth billions, even trillions of credits."

"Grud," the dispatcher whistled softly.

"Of course, I could be wrong about this," Anderson continued. "Maybe it's only a coincidence that Marjorie Kulack's mother was part of the same test as all the other victims. Maybe it's only a coincidence that Marjorie herself grew up to be psychic. Maybe I've been on the job too long and I'm starting to see conspiracies everywhere. The only way we're going to find

out is if we test those thirteen people and see if they have psychic potential. In the meantime, it might be a good idea to shake the tree at HelixCorp and see what falls out. Tell Tek Division to see what else they can find that relates to these medical tests in the company records, have Accounts Division go through their financial records with a fine tooth comb, and schedule crime swoops on all the senior company officers. Also, have the company CEO Douglas Mortimer brought in for interrogation. I already gave him a surface telepathic probe and he seems clean. Still, it won't hurt to double check."

"You realise that we're talking about a major MegaCorp here? If you're wrong about this-"

"If I'm wrong about this, then the Justice Department's Private Sector Liaison Committee can line up with Sector Chief Collins and everybody else who wants to haul me over the coals. If I'm right, then nobody's going to care if a few feathers got ruffled along the way."

"All right, don't say I didn't warn you tho-" The dispatcher stopped abruptly. Then, his voice returned, more excited. "Anderson! We've just received an update from MAC regarding a query from Judge Loudon on your behalf. You asked for an analysis of correlations between the word 'block' and the Trinity Heights neighbourhood?"

"Yeah, that's right. Have you got something for me?"

"MAC came up with two different sets of correlations," the dispatcher told her. "First, it compared the word as spelt 'B-L-O-C-K' to Trinity Heights and found forty-seven possible locations with that word in their address. But there's a second spelling that's pronounced the same way: 'B-L-O-C-H' meaning the name 'Bloch'. And there's only one address in Trinity Heights with that version of the word in its address - Robert Bloch Con-apts, named after a twentieth century writer."

SEVENTEEN

IN THE LAIR OF MONSTERS

"It looks deserted," Dietz said after they had parked their lawmasters outside Robert Bloch Con-apts. At first sight, the building seemed like so many others in Trinity Heights: crumbling and derelict, with storey after storey of empty windows staring out from its fire-blackened walls.

"It would do," Anderson told him. "That's what makes it perfect for our perp. there're no neighbours, aside maybe for the occasional dog-vulture, and no surveillance cameras. The roentgen count in this place keeps people away. The perp can come and go as he pleases, with nobody watching him. There's nobody to get suspicious that he goes out all night and comes back with dried blood in his hair. Like I say, it's perfect. He even told Weller the name, probably not realising that Weller would think he said 'block'."

"So how do you want to play it?" Dietz asked her as he checked the magazine in his Lawgiver. "Do we split up and search different floors, or do you want us to search each floor together?"

"Neither," Anderson said. Turning to her lawmaster, she opened the rear stowage pod and took out a flashlight. "You stay out here, I go in alone. The perp's a teledominant, he can make people do anything he tells them. As a Psi-Judge I'm best equipped to deal with him. No offence, but that's just the way it is. Keep your eyes open, stay sharp and tight. If you see anyone hanging around who isn't a Judge, hit them with a stun-shot and ask questions later. And one more thing..." Switching on the flashlight, she began to move towards the building.

"Seeing as I'm probably heading into a trap, if you haven't heard from me in twenty minutes you might want to get Control to contact Psi Division and ask them to send a new Psi-Judge."

All right, so you got what you wanted, Cass, Anderson thought to herself as she moved slowly through the building's ground floor foyer. You're hunting a psychic serial killer in a burnt-out building and you were crazy enough to come in here without backup. Plus, without a working elevator, you're going to have to walk up about thirty flights of stairs to search this place top-to-bottom. Still, all things considered, it could be worse.

At least it isn't raining.

If the Robert Bloch Con-Apts had seemed a foreboding sight from the outside, inside it was even worse. Swinging the beam of her flashlight around as she advanced with her Lawgiver in her hand, Anderson picked her way carefully across the soot-stained and debris-strewn floor. Here and there, she heard the creak of plasteen floorboards indicating the footing beneath her was insecure. Mindful of the dangers of the floor collapsing, she stayed close to the walls in the hope that the floor there would be stronger. All the same, it was slow work simply crossing from one end of the foyer to the other. She soon realised that searching the entire building could take hours.

Got to look at this from another angle, she thought. If I'm a killer, where's the likeliest spot for me to hide in his place? There's no electricity in the building. If he wanted heat and light, he'd have to build a fire. But he'd want to keep it hidden - in a derelict ghost town like this the light of the flames could be seen for miles. Plus, the floors are bad. All of which suggests there's only one place he could be.

The basement.

"I want you to keep on walking," William whispered to the Judge outside. "Then, when you've walked five hundred steps, I want you to take your gun and put it in your mouth. After that, I want you to pull the trigger. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Judge Dietz said. When William had appeared suddenly behind him, the Judge had tried to bring his Lawgiver to bear to shoot him, but William's words were faster than any gun.

"Good. You have a silencer for your gun?"

"Yes." Despite the coolness of the night, the Judge's face was sweating.

"Then, put the silencer on before you put the gun in your mouth. We don't want Judge Anderson to hear the shot, do we? She might come running to investigate." William turned to look towards his lair and smiled. "Right now, she is exactly where I want her."

It's no good, Anderson thought, as she stood beside a rubble-choked stairwell. If the creep lives in the basement, he doesn't use this way to get down there.

She had been searching for fifteen minutes, trying to find a way down into the basement. So far, her efforts had been thwarted. She had checked

the building's two emergency stairwells and found them impassably blocked by fallen debris. The only other access to the basement seemed to be via the elevators. And, given the state of the building, it was safe to assume that the elevators were out of order.

Anderson had a thought. Granted, the electromagnetic pulse of the warhead would have destroyed whatever parts of the building's electrical system might otherwise have survived the firestorm, but so long as the elevator shafts themselves were intact, the perp could use them to climb back-and-forth to the basement. Retracing her steps to the foyer, still mindful not to put her feet on any of the weaker floorboards, she made her way to the nearest elevator and saw something that immediately raised her suspicions. The elevator doors had fallen from their mountings, but one of them was wedged in the shaft in a fashion that did not seem accidental. Investigating more closely, she found a rope tied to the underside of the door that led down into the darkness of the shaft. The rope was knotted at regular intervals to make climbing easier.

Looks like this is his point of access all right, she thought. Moving gingerly to the edge of the shaft, she shone her flashlight down it. At the bottom of the shaft she could see the outline of a smashed elevator carriage that had presumably fallen when its cable had snapped. Although I'm not sure I like the idea of climbing down there when the perp could be waiting for me.

"Drop the pistol," said a voice behind her.

Turning her head slightly to the side, from the corner of her eyes she saw a man in a black overcoat standing a couple of metres behind her in the foyer. His hands were empty. She turned to face him, raising the Lawgiver and pointing it at him.

"Drop the pistol," the man said again, more forcefully. Every time he spoke she could feel ripples moving around her as though the currents of the psi-flux had been stirred by the sound of his voice, only for those same ripples to break against the walls of her psychic defences.

"You're wasting your time," she told him, pointedly pulling back on the hammer of her gun to underline her words. "That won't work on me. Put your hands in the air. You're under arrest for the murders of Judge Edward Weller and seven citizens."

"Seven?" The perp tilted his head to the side, his lips moving silently as he made a mental calculation. "That would mean you're counting Lenny

then? It's funny, I never really thought of him as one of mine. I didn't kill Lenny. I just made him fly. Oh, and I killed two Judges by the way, not just one. You didn't know that? Her name was Wilkins, I think. No, not Wilkins, Wilkerson. She had blonde hair and when I was killing her I was thinking of you. Then, there were the others: the doctor, the patient in the institution, my father, but of course, I didn't kill those last three in Mega-City One." He smiled liked a child expecting praise for his cleverness. "Do they count?"

"They all count," Anderson told him. "I said, put your hands in the air. Do it now, slowly."

"No, you're wrong there," the killer said, his hands still staying resolutely by his sides. "Only the reds count. That's why I do it. I like killing reds." His smile became broader. "Like you. You're red. In fact, you're the reddest person I've ever seen."

"Ten seconds," Anderson said. "That's how long I'm giving you to raise your hands unless you want to get hit with a stun-shot. Ten... Nine... Eight..."

"You say that like you think you're in control, Judge." The smile grew broader still, confident, self-assured. "You're not in control. This is my lair, my home. I've only been here a few days, but already I know every nook and cranny, every entrance, every exit, every floorboard."

Raising his hands slowly, the perp's body seemed to sway gently to one side as though he had altered his balance. Hearing an alarming creak from the floor beneath her, Anderson realised what he was doing. The perp had shifted his weight from one foot to another, putting extra weight on a damaged floorboard that he had known was there all along. The floor gave way beneath them with a sudden jolt, throwing off Anderson's aim as she fired a stun-shot. The shot went wide over the perp's shoulder, while the floor collapsed beneath them, pitching them both headlong into the basement. The world spun on its axis. Anderson's last sight was of the perp's smiling face.

Then, she was falling into darkness.

She hit the ground hard, the flashlight was knocked from her hand by the impact, the circle of its beam turning crazy cartwheels as it jumped and skipped away across the floor. Winded, Anderson stumbled to her feet and tried to go after it. Her senses warned her of danger. Feeling the presence of an assailant leaping towards her in the darkness, she raised her Lawgiver.

The gun's barrel met her attacker's blow and deflected it with a metallic clang. The impact forced the gun from her hand, sending it spinning away into the darkness. The perp attacked again, slashing at her with a wide sweep of his blade that skittered across one of the plasteen plates of her body armour. She felt blood at her side and realised that the knife had penetrated her armour. Acting on reflex she directed a low kick into the darkness in front of her, hearing a satisfying gasp of pain as the ball of her foot connected with bone.

The perp moved away. The silence returned. Blood seeped slowly down her side. Ears straining, Anderson heard the quiet sounds of the perp's breathing as he edged in a circle around her. It was as if he could see her in the darkness. Seeing the beam of the flashlight shining dimly in the distance, her first instinct was to run towards it. Realising it would present her back to the perp, she began to move sideaways instead, trying to second-guess the perp and traverse a circle within his circle. She saw a leg silhouetted by the beam of the flashlight behind it. She lashed out with a kick again, raising her foot higher and making contact with a softer target. She heard the air explode from the perp's mouth.

Pressing home her momentary advantage, she charged towards where she thought he was, only to suddenly feel his hand grab hold of her hair as he pulled her head back. The perp was going to try to cut her throat! But he had made a mistake. Anderson remembered Noland telling her that the perp was right-handed, so she twisted to her left and raised her right shoulder, the blade deflecting harmlessly off the armoured shoulder pad of her uniform. She reached back with her left hand grabbed the wrist of the hand holding her hair and twisted it. The perp shrieked. His hand released her hair. Using the movement of her body to increase the leverage, she twisted the wrist further, at the same time stepping backwards to overextend his arm.

The movement unbalanced the perp, causing him to fall to his knees. Wary of the knife in his other hand, she twisted his wrist further, dislocating it. The perp shrieked again. She twisted further, harder. As he shrieked once more, she kicked him in the stomach, and then used her leverage on his wrist to push him face down on the floor. With her knee in the small of his back, she used her free hand to grab his other arm and pull it behind him. Fumbling in the dark, she pulled a pair of handcuffs from her belt and put them on his wrists as he struggled.

"In case you're wondering," she said as she snapped the cuffs shut, "this is what it feels like when you're no longer in control."

Lifting him by the arms, Anderson frog-marched the perp towards the fallen flashlight, but, even as she bent forward to pick it up, she felt a change come over her prisoner. With a strangled gasp, the perp fell to the ground as his body began to shake. At first cautious in case it was a trick, Anderson shone the flashlight in his face. The perp's eyes had rolled back in his head, while white froth gathered at his lips. He was having convulsions. Then, as she turned the spastically flailing perp on his side to keep his airways clear, Anderson saw an image from inside his mind...

Daytime. The apartment in Ciudad Baranquilla, sunlight streaming in through the windows, his father sitting in his chair. William is two years old the first time the spiders come for him.

The image is gone, quickly replaced by other images as she is suddenly subjected to a disturbing kaleidoscopic cascade of the killer's memories. She sees the same boy a year later, huddling under the covers of his bed as a black tide of spiders flows across the floor around him. She sees him older, discovering the colours of the human aura for the first time as he realises his father is a Red. She sees the boy older again as he pulls a jagged piece of glass across his father's throat. She sees the institution. She sees the Grey Man. She sees their bargain. She sees the list of twenty names. She sees the deaths of Margaret Penrith and all the others. She sees the killer's name - William Ganz. Above all else she sees herself through William's eyes as he spots her for the first time outside Sissy Spacek Block. To him, she is an angel surrounded by a bright fiery halo: a halo so brilliant that it hurts him to look at it. She sees it all, granted access to every one of William's memories for half a second. She sees it, and even as the images pass before her she comes to a realisation.

Something is wrong.

The memories in William Ganz's mind are dying. As each image flashes through his mind, it is shredded and disappears. Piece by piece, drop by drop, memory by memory, everything that exists of William's personality is being destroyed, fading away before her eyes. Where once there was a man's mind, there is now only a void: a black hole, a blank slate, an empty canyon, and then...

It was over. Drawing a sudden gasp as the contact was broken, Anderson looked down at William Ganz in horror. The convulsions had stopped. His

eyes had rolled back around, but now, all that was left of him was a dribbling, drooling husk.

He's been mind-wiped, Anderson thought. It's like someone set his memories to self-destruct if he was captured. And, if I hadn't been the one to capture him - if I hadn't been holding onto him at that vital second - I never would have known it had happened. Whoever did it, they must be the people behind him, the people who gave him the list of twenty names and set him on the road to killing. It's as if they're trying to cover their traces. But they made one mistake.

Casting her mind back to the memories she had just experienced, Anderson concentrated on the image of a man she had seen in William's mind: a man in a grey suit, with blond hair and a sardonic, arrogant manner. Even as his memories were dying, William had realised what was going on. Seeing his own memories flash and fade before him, he had realised exactly who was responsible. In his final moments of lucidity, William had reached a new understanding. He had realised who it was that had betrayed him. Now, thanks to his insight, Anderson understood it, too. She realised who had betrayed William Ganz. She realised who had mind-wiped him. It was the man she could see in the image in her mind. The man William had called the Grey Man. He was the man who had all the answers to all the questions raised by this case: the murders, the list of names, HelixCorp's involvement.

Now, all she had to do was find him.

EIGHTEEN

EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

"We found him about half a klick away," Loudon said to her after the various resources of the Justice Department had arrived to attend to the clean-up following the arrest of William Ganz. Tek-Judges were there to sweep Robert Bloch con-apts for forensic evidence that might lead her to the Grey Man. A Med-Judge was present to see to the bloody but shallow cut that Ganz's knife had left in her side. And there was an ambulance to take Ganz himself away to Psi-Lab for observation while they tried to work out whether his condition was permanent. Loudon had also arrived, at first ostensibly to assist the other Judges, but now to mourn another fallen comrade.

"It looks like suicide," Loudon continued. She was talking about Dietz. "He shot himself with his own Lawgiver."

"No, it wasn't suicide," Anderson told her. "The perp used his powers to make him do it. I saw it in Ganz's mind before he was mind-wiped, but by then it was too late to do anything about it." She paused. Despite the fact that she wore the tough veneer of the typical Street Judge, Loudon was clearly upset. "If it's any consolation, Ganz has already paid the ultimate penalty for his crimes. Having your mind wiped is about as harsh a punishment as you can get. Chances are, he'll spend the rest of his days as a dribbling imbecile. It's like a living death."

"Yeah? Well that's no more than the drokker deserves then," Loudon said, the minuscule crack in her veneer abruptly disappearing. As Anderson watched the Street Judge stalk away, she found herself pitying the next perp who tried to mess with Loudon.

"Control to Anderson." The dispatcher's voice came over her radio.

"Anderson receiving, Control," she sighed. It had been a long night. "I hope you've got some good news for me. I could use it."

"You might want to prepare yourself for disappointment then, Anderson," Control answered her gruffly. "You remember you requested that Douglas Mortimer be brought in for interrogation? Well, it looks like we may have something of a problem."

It was the colours, or lack of them, that surprised him most. Having never been in a Sector House interrogation suite before, Douglas Mortimer had assumed that the colours there would naturally follow the usual Justice Department colour scheme of blue and gold. Instead, it turned out that every feature of the room he sat in was the same uniform shade of grey. The walls, the door, the chairs, the table he sat at, all of them were grey. And not just any grey, but a particular shade of washed-out grey that he was sure no one other than a Judge would ever consider using. It was as though he had been transported without his knowledge to some dull monochrome world where colour had been abandoned, while he sat to wait in fear of judgement.

Finally, the door to the interrogation suite opened and a Judge stepped into the room. Recognising her as the same Psi-Judge who had come to his office yesterday, Mortimer felt a brief and familiar tang of fear. Then, remembering that attack was the best form of defence, he took the offensive.

"I demand to see your superior," he told her, using the same voice he had often used to terrify under-performing middle managers. "This is an outrage. First, a Judge comes to my apartment in the middle of the night. Then, I am forced to wait in this limbo for hours. I want to speak to Chief Lochner at Med-Division immediately."

"I'm afraid the Med-Chief isn't available," Anderson said. If she was even remotely terrified of his voice, she gave no sign of it. "You'll have to speak to me."

"I want to know what charge I've been arrested on. I have my rights."

"No," Anderson shook her head. She almost seemed saddened. "No, you don't. Not here. Not anymore. You can see that can't you? They don't do rights here, only confessions. And believe me when I tell you if you don't talk now, you won't get another chance. Now, why don't you start by telling me about HelixHealth and the medical tests for this so-called cancer vaccine?"

Unsettled by her strangely melancholy manner, for a moment Mortimer found he was at a loss for words. Then, almost despite himself, he began talking.

"Project Changeling," he said. "That's what they called it." Even as he began to speak, he wondered why he was doing it. Why, having kept the secret for so long, did he suddenly feel the need to just blurt it out? Briefly,

he wondered if the Judges had done something to him. He had heard that they sometimes used low-frequency sound waves and truth drugs to get a suspect to crack. It could even be that the Psi-Judge was surreptitiously using her powers on him. Whatever the cause, he found himself compelled to take a course of action that was the antithesis of everything he had learned in twenty years in the world of business. He wanted to play his cards cleanly and honestly. He wanted to tell the truth.

"The whole cancer vaccine business was just a cover story," he told her. "The project's real purpose was to research the possibility of creating a method to allow the large-scale breeding of psychics. Suitable candidates were chosen based on their genetic profile and approached by HelixCorp with an offer of employment-"

"Suitable candidates? You mean pregnant women?"

"No, not pregnant," Mortimer said. "Not at first, anyway. As I say, they were chosen on the basis of genetic profiling as women who had a higher than normal chance of producing psychic offspring. At some point during the program they were given an anaesthetic and artificially inseminated without their knowledge. The semen samples used for the insemination had been genetically modified, again to increase the likelihood of psychic offspring from the union. Then, further drugs and treatments were given to them during their pregnancies, which the researchers hoped would yet further increase the chance of a successful result."

"And what about the women? With all these immaculate conceptions going on, didn't anybody get wise?"

"The researchers had already accounted for that. As well as fitting the genetic profile, the subjects had to fit other criteria. They had to be sexually active, ideally even promiscuous, with a tendency to believe what they were told by authority figures so that they wouldn't ask too many difficult questions. They also had to have moral qualms about abortion, and they were kept separate from each other so they couldn't compare experiences. In each case, the woman believed the father of her baby was her husband or a boyfriend. Apparently, it all went pretty smoothly."

"All right, so what happened next?"

"In due course, thirty of the project subjects carried their children to term. But when the children were tested to see if they had psychic potential, all the tests came back negative. By then a lot of money had been sunk into the project, so the company decided to cut its losses. Project Changeling was

quietly disbanded, the researchers were bought off, and the happy mothers were sent on their way. The whole thing was forgotten, until a few months ago when a report landed on my desk and I found out about Changeling for the first time. That's when the shit really hit the fan."

"Go on," Anderson encouraged him. There seemed a sudden urgency to her mood, as though she thought they were pressed for time.

"At the time the project was disbanded, the company arranged to continue quietly monitoring the children just in case anything unforeseen should happen. That's where HelixHealth came in. The children were all offered free medical checks every three months, to allow their psychic potential to be covertly and continually assessed. For forty years it looked like they were just ordinary citizens. Then, a few months ago, some of them started to manifest the first signs of emerging psychic powers: uncontrolled random telepathy, minor telekinetic abilities, lucky guesses that turned out to be incredibly accurate, and so on. In each case, they were persuaded they were suffering from stress-induced mental illness and given a course of psi-blockers disguised as antidepressants. It quickly became clear that the children we thought had no psychic potential had all grown up to be latent psychics, and that meant that the company had a serious problem."

"What I don't understand is why you became involved at all?" Anderson asked him. "Granted, we're talking about the company being guilty of multiple counts of Illegal Experimentation. The people who ran the project could be facing sentences of a hundred years or more in the iso-cubes, but this all occurred forty-one years ago, way before you could have been with the company. Why did you try to cover up something that happened so long ago?"

"The share price," Mortimer told her. Given the question the Psi-Judge had just asked him, she either knew nothing about business or was very naïve. "It doesn't matter how long ago it happened. If word got out that the Justice Department was investigating HelixCorp over illegal experiments, the share price would have fallen through the floor. I have the stockholders to think of, not to mention that half of my salary is paid in HelixCorp shares for tax reasons. If Project Changeling had become public knowledge, the company would have had a run on its stock and I would have been ruined."

"So that's what it came down to in the end? Money?" Anderson seemed quietly appalled. "You became involved in multiple murders because of your company's share price?"

"I didn't think there would be any killing involved," Mortimer said. He shuddered, suddenly, as though somewhere, someone was walking on his grave. "Not at first, but I needed the whole business to go away as quickly as possible. That's when I hired Carlyle."

"Carlyle?"

"He's a psychic mercenary who specialises in covert operations, industrial espionage and wet-work. No one knows too much about him. Some people say he used to be with Brit-Cit Intelligence, others say he's always been a freelancer. Either way, he's the man to go to when you have an unsolvable problem that needs to be dealt with. He comes highly recommended. What I didn't realise was that I was digging a hole for myself by even hiring him." He felt the shudder run through him again. "You wouldn't believe how ruthless he is."

"Enlighten me."

"Carlyle is paranoid about security. So much so, that when I wanted to hire him I had to deal with an intermediary who instructed me to put all the details of the proposed mission onto a data-slug and send it to Hondo City via courier, hidden inside a Tri-D recorder. I followed the instructions, but then I heard that the courier had jumped in front of a zoom train in Hondo and was dead. Two days later, I arrive at work to find Carlyle waiting for me in my office. He tells me that rather than picking up the data-slug, he telepathically compelled the courier to read it for him so that Carlyle could read the information in his mind from afar. Then, because the courier now knew the details of the mission, he made him commit suicide by jumping in front of a train. All that just so that no one would see the courier meeting with Carlyle to hand over the slug. He said it was important to maintain 'operational security'. The man's a monster."

"And yet you hired him anyway?"

"I was desperate. Besides, once Carlyle is involved, you don't say no to him. By this time, of the thirty children who were born as part of Project Changeling, only twenty of them were still alive as adults. Carlyle said we should kill them as that would be the best way of keeping the whole thing under wraps. He said we should use a proxy to do the killing and make it look like the work of a random serial killer so no one would get suspicious. He even had a suitable proxy in mind. 'A young man whose career I've been following,' he said. 'The son of an old friend of mine'. He laughed about that. He said the proxy was stupid and malleable, yet a powerful enough

psychic to be able to deal with any problems. From that point on he took charge of things and everything simply spiralled out of control."

"What does Carlyle look like?" Anderson asked. "Is he blond, with a grey suit and arrogant manner?"

"That's him. He always wears grey. The Grey Man. He said some people call him that. He laughed about that as well."

"What else can you tell me about him? Anything that might help us find him?"

"Find him?" Once again, it seemed to him that the Psi-Judge was incredibly naïve. "Believe me, you won't find him. I told you how paranoid he is. Before I hired him, I heard a story that he will sometimes kill people just so he can use their bank accounts or homes or travel tickets. He doesn't actually need these things - he does it to help obscure his trail so his enemies won't find him. That's what I heard, and after dealing with him I believe it." For a moment, Mortimer found himself distracted by the colour of his own arms. His skin seemed to have turned grey, as though his body had become infected by the greyness all around him. Dismissing it as some strange trick of the light, he turned to Anderson once more.

"You realise you have to protect me from him," he told her. "Carlyle would kill me if he found out that I told you all about him. Do you hear me? You must protect me."

"I hear you." Again, Anderson looked at him with a saddened expression. "But as far as protecting you goes..." She paused as though she was about become the bearer of bad news. "It's too late for anyone to protect you now."

Coming out of her trance, Anderson was first aware of the sounds of the Med-Bay around her: the wheezing rise and fall of the respirator beside the bed, the beeping of heart and blood pressure monitors and the high-pitched electrical whine of cardiac paddles being charged.

"We're losing him," she heard a man's voice shout in controlled desperation. "Give me two more units of 'O' neg and thirty ccs of adrenaline! Stat!"

Opening her eyes, she saw that the area around the man lying in the bed before her was surrounded by a flurry of activity, as Med-Judges and nurse-auxiliaries worked to save their patient's life. Suddenly, one of the Med-Judges tried to push past her with a pair of electric paddles.

"Anderson!" he shouted. "You'll have to break contact. We need to restart his heart."

"No, it's too late." She shook her head. "Believe me, there's nothing left for you to save. He's gone."

"You're sure?" the Med-Judge asked her. Seeing her nod, he turned to the rest of the med-team. "All right, let's call it. Time of death." He looked at his watch. "I make it three forty-seven. Anyone know what the patient's name was?"

"Mortimer," Anderson said. "Douglas Mortimer."

"All right, Douglas Mortimer died at three forty-seven. Let's get this bed cleared in case we need it for another patient."

Turning away as the med-team returned to their other duties, Anderson suddenly noticed Med-Judge Noland standing by the Med-Bay doors.

"Things getting slow in the morgue, doc?" Anderson asked him. "Have you come upstairs to tout for business?"

"I heard you brought in Weller's killer," Noland said. "Thought I'd come and congratulate you. Then, I heard you were scanning someone up here, a live body rather than a cadaver, this time."

"Yeah, well, he was alive," she nodded towards the body on the bed. "Douglas Mortimer, CEO of HelixCorp. When a Judge went to his apartment to bring him in for questioning, Mortimer jumped out of a fiftieth floor window. The only thing that saved him from being instant munce-paste was that he hit a flagpole on the way down, and then landed on the roof of a car. That kept him alive long enough for him to be brought to Med-Bay so I could do a deep telepathic probe. The sad thing is that Mortimer had blanked out what had happened to him. While I was probing him, he developed an elaborate fantasy that he was in an interrogation suite and I was asking him questions. It happens sometimes when people are near to the point of death. Their minds take all kinds of flights of fancy."

"I wouldn't know," Noland shrugged gently. "I usually only get them afterwards. So that's it then? The case is over."

"No," Anderson shook her head. "Mortimer was the money man, but the real creep behind this was a psychic mercenary called Carlyle. He sounds like a nasty piece of work. He mind-wiped the killer Ganz, and I think he probably put a telepathic suggestion in Mortimer's unconscious to make him try to kill himself if he thought he was going to be arrested. Carlyle can be pretty extreme when it comes to covering over his traces."

"Sounds like it. You got any leads on him?"

"I wish. So far he's even more of a ghost than Ganz. The Justice Department has no record of him, Brit-Cit denies all knowledge of him. Everybody claims they've never heard of him. Mortimer said that Carlyle is paranoid about security and it sounds like he is." Something that Mortimer had mentioned to her suddenly rang a bell in Anderson's head. "Excuse me, doc." Heading out into the hallway, Anderson hit the transmit button on her radio.

"Anderson to Control."

"Control receiving, Anderson. Over."

"Patch me through to one of the Tek-Judges analysing the HelixCorp records ASAP. Tell him it's urgent."

"Jenkins, Tek Division," a woman's voice came over the radio after a short pause. "What can I do for you, Anderson?"

"Does HelixCorp have a corporate account to cover business travel for their executives? If so, I want to know about any tickets that have been bought in the last six hours, using that account."

"Okay. Hang on a minute." There was another pause. "Yeah. A ticket was purchased out of the account two hours ago for an executive named Thomas Grey. Hmm, that's funny. The ticket was purchased using Douglas Mortimer's password, but I can't find any record of an executive called Thomas Grey in the company directory."

"This ticket, where is it for, and when?"

"Let's see. It's for the four-thirty flight to Brit-Cit out of Kennedy Hoverport."

"Control! I need you back on the line."

"Control here, Anderson."

"Contact the Senior Judge in charge of security at Kennedy and tell him to detain one Thomas Grey, due to fly out of Mega City One on the four-thirty to Brit-Cit. Tell him Thomas Grey may be an alias for Carlyle, AKA the Grey Man, a powerful and dangerous psychic wanted for multiple counts of Conspiracy to Commit Murder. Tell them to use extreme caution and be prepared to shoot if he even looks at them funny. I want him alive if possible, but whatever happens he must not to be allowed to leave the city."

"Got it," Control said. "Relaying your request. Where will you be?"

"Right now I'm on my way to the Sector House landing pad. I don't care if I have to commandeer an H-Wagon and pilot the damn thing myself. I'm

getting to Kennedy before the four-thirty flight leaves for Brit-Cit!"

NINETEEN

RESURRECTION

The Grey Man said he was his friend. The Grey Man lied to him. The Grey Man had betrayed him. The Grey Man had tried to destroy him.

Those words were all he had left to him. Lying in a straitjacket on a gurney in the back of an ambulance as it transported him across the city, the words echoed round and round his empty skull. His name was gone. His past was gone. His memories, his personality, even his feelings. All of them were gone. All he had left were the last thoughts to go through his head before his mind had been destroyed: thoughts that, even now, repeated themselves in a desolate and unending mantra.

The Grey Man said he was his friend. The Grey Man lied to him. The Grey Man had betrayed him. The Grey Man had tried to destroy him.

"I don't know," a voice said. "I tell you, sometimes this job gets me down."

He heard the words distantly, not even understanding them, dimly aware that they came from one of the men sitting in the driver's compartment in front of him.

"I mean, first, Anderson tells us to take him to Omar House so Psi-Lab can do tests on him. Then, Psi-Lab says they're full up and we should take him to the nearest Sector House until they've got more space. Then, the watch commander at the Sector House says we should take him to an iso-block. Then, the iso-block warders say we should take him to the psych-cubes. And now, what are the odds that when we get to the psych-cubes they tell us we should take him back to Omar. I mean, it's like they think we're running some kind of glorified taxi service."

"Not even that," a second voice joined the first one. "At least taxis get to carry people. All we're doing is transporting a vegetable."

There was laughter. As the sound reached his ears it seemed brittle and unreal, of less substance than the words inside his head.

The Grey Man said he was his friend. The Grey Man lied to him. The Grey Man had betrayed him. The Grey Man had tried to destroy him.

"What say we flick through the channels on the comm?" the first voice said. "See what's happening in the rest of the city."

There was a confusing and indescribable noise, alternating between a welter of voices and bursts of static. Then he heard something outside his head that finally had meaning to him.

"All units to the vicinity of Kennedy Hoverport, be on the lookout for a suspect described as male caucasian, late thirties, blond hair, wearing a grey suit. Be advised the suspect possesses psychic powers and is to be considered extremely dangerous. Suspect answers to the name of Thomas Grey, also known as Carlyle and the Grey Man. Psi-Judge Anderson is en route to the scene to aid with identification of the suspect. Be advised, the subject is to be considered extremely dangerous."

The Grey Man. Anderson.

Slowly, the words started to break through the idiot haze of his mind. Slowly, memory was rekindled from its last dying embers. Slowly, he came back to himself.

The Grey Man. Anderson.

The Grey Man lied to him. He betrayed him. He had tried to destroy him. Anderson had hurt him. She had chained him. It was her fault he was here in a straitjacket on his way to another institution. Echoes of his past flitted at the corners of his mind. Anderson. She was a Red, the light of her soulshadow like unearthly blinding fire. Red, he hated the colour. Red, it hurt him, burning through his eyelids into his brain. He hated the colour red. He hated the people who were red. The floodgates of memory opened. Suddenly he was reborn.

He was William Ganz. He killed reds. He would kill Anderson, but first he had added a new name to his list.

The Grey Man.

Anderson.

He hated them. He would kill them both. He would gouge out their eyes. He would stamp on their entrails. He would eat their hearts.

The Grey Man and Anderson.

They were together in the same place, the radio had said so. He would find them. He would kill them. He was William Ganz. He was a monster. The night and the city belonged to him. His voice was like thunder. All who heard him obeyed him.

"Take me to Kennedy Hoverport. Take me there now."

He said the words aloud. His voice was forceful, powerful. As the men in the driver's compartment heard it, he felt the ambulance turn and head east

as they followed his instruction.

The Grey Man. Anderson. William Ganz. Kennedy Hoverport. They were moths draw to the heat of a burning flame.

Soon, there would be a reckoning.

"You're talking about landing in the middle of a hoverport, for Grud's sake," the H-Wagon's pilot had said to her first. "I don't care if we're over the terminal building. It's restricted airspace. It doesn't matter what kind of emergency you claim this is, we can't land there without clearance. I can put us down on the H-Wagon landing pad, east of the terminal. If you run fast from there, you can get to the Brit-Cit departures desk inside ten minutes."

"What do you mean ten minutes is too long?" the pilot had asked her. "What? Of course we're equipped with anti-grav chutes. Anderson? Hey, that's the door control! Anderson! What do you think you're doing, you crazy bi-"

Whatever he had said to her next, she had not heard it.

Leaping through the open side door of the H-Wagon in mid-air, she counted to five before activating the hand-held anti-grav chute she had taken from the H-Wagon's storage locker. Below, the departures terminal for Kennedy Hoverport seemed to jump in her vision as the chute deployed and the rate of her descent suddenly decreased. Releasing the chute a few feet above the plascrete, she hit the ground running, her hand already going to her radio as she crossed the short distance to the main terminal entrance.

"This is Psi-Judge Anderson, requesting contact with the Senior Judge in charge of hoverport security. Over."

"Acknowledged, Anderson. This is Senior Judge Urich. Did I just see you jump out of an H-Wagon in mid-flight?"

"Roger that, Urich. This is a hot pursuit. Request you assign all available manpower to apprehend rogue psychic Thomas Gray, AKA Carlyle."

"Already on it, Anderson. There's no sign of the drokker as yet. I'll meet you at the terminal entrance. Over and out."

Inside, the terminal building was crowded with citizens awaiting their flights. As she stepped through the terminal door, she saw a thickset Judge in his forties waiting for her.

"Drokk," she said as she ran to meet him. "Is this place usually this busy at four in the morning?"

"You think this is bad, you should see what the afternoon shift has to put up with," Urich replied. "I've got Judges working the crowd and Surveillance has been issued with a description of your perp. They're about to give the last call for check-in on the Brit-Cit leaving at four-thirty. What say we set up near the Departures Desk and see if you can spot him?"

"I think it would be a better idea if I went to your Surveillance Control Centre," Anderson told him. "I can telepathically send the image of the perp into the minds of the Judges monitoring the cameras so they'll know exactly what he looks-"

Suddenly, as the crowd momentarily parted before them, she caught a glimpse of Carlyle. Startled, as she stared at him their eyes met. Carlyle smiled, apparently in recognition, and she felt a bolt of psychic energy surge towards her through the psi-flux like a dagger of the mind. She raised her defences, feeling the mindbolt shatter against her shields as she went for the Lawgiver in her boot holster. Carlyle smiled again, wider. His hands went inside his coat, emerging with the lethal weight of a pump action stump gun held between them. Even as she wondered how in Grud's name he had managed to sneak a gun of that size into the hoverport, she was already calling out a warning to Urich beside her.

"*Urich! Look out!"*

The warning came too late. As Carlyle fired, she saw Urich thrown backwards, a great red flower of gore blooming from his chest. People were screaming. The crowd began to run. Working the slide on the underside of his gun, Carlyle fired again. A woman ran in front of Anderson and took the blast in her face. Even as Carlyle worked the slide again, Anderson's own hand moved with nightmare slowness. Finally, she raised the gun and levelled it at Carlyle. They fired in unison, Carlyle's shot going wild to hit a screaming mother carrying her child, while Anderson's shot hit her target between the eyes. His head snapping back, Carlyle looked at her for a moment in dumb amazement as blood seeped from the hole in his forehead. His eyes grew empty. The bright smile grew dim.

"Anderson!" She heard Urich's voice. For a moment she was confused. She wondered how he could speak so loudly with a chest wound. Then she looked around her and realised that there was no sign of the carnage she had witnessed seconds earlier. There was no Carlyle. No blood or wounded bodies littered the concourse. The crowd went about its business as normal.

"Anderson! I thought you said this was a hot pursuit? What the drokk are you doing just standing there?"

Turning, she saw Urich standing beside her, looking like he was all but ready to shake her. She wondered how long she had been in a daze.

"He's here," Anderson said. "Carlyle. He just tried to use some kind of mind-trick on me. He's good at it, too. The whole thing seemed so real." She shook her head to clear it.

"Let's go," she said. "Carlyle's just shown us that he's here. Let's go and find him."

She found him by the baggage carousel, just to the side of the opening in the wall where the track of the conveyor belt returned unclaimed luggage to the baggage department. There was a woman standing next to him and Carlyle had his left arm loosely around her shoulder while his right hand was in his jacket pocket.

"Hello, Cassandra," he smiled as Anderson approached him. "You don't know what a pleasure it is to finally meet you."

"You are under arrest." As Anderson levelled her Lawgiver at him, Urich and a file of Judges spread out to either side of her and did likewise, while the crowds of travellers in the area began to flee. "Put your hands up and step away from the woman."

"Arrest me? I don't think so, Cassandra." The woman beside him seemed paralysed and hardly aware of her surroundings. "As for the woman here, you might as well use her name. It's Suzanne, in case you're interested. With a little psychic prodding I've temporarily disabled her body's motor skills, so don't expect her to start dancing anytime soon. Oh, and she's the mother of three children: Jack, Chloe and Beatrice. I thought you'd want to know their names before you make any decisions that might turn them into orphans."

"Release her and put your hands up," Anderson said. "Don't make this more difficult than it has to be."

"More difficult? Oh, I think you'll find it's already more difficult than you think it is, Cassandra." Opening his left hand, Carlyle revealed the round shape of a frag grenade. "You'll notice I've pulled the pin. Now, if I should be compelled to release the grenade for any reason, say for instance by being shot, then let's just say we will all be going to meet our makers together."

"You're surrounded," Anderson told him. "You must know you're not going to get away from here. Surrender and I promise you will be treated fairly."

"By being caged in a psi-cube with all the other delinquent psychics, you mean? Come on now, Cassandra, I'm sure the Justice Department teaches better hostage negotiation skills than that. You might do better by asking me what I want first, and we can negotiate from there. Tell you what, why don't I tell you..." Carlyle paused as if to clear his throat.

"I want you all to drop your guns and leave them on the floor!" Even as he said the words, Anderson could feel the psychic force in them. While she still kept her Lawgiver tightly gripped and levelled at Carlyle, the other Judges around her dropped their guns on the floor.

"Hmm, it seems we have had a slight change in the balance of power, Cassandra." Carlyle's smile grew insufferably smug. "Of course, I could order one of your fellow Judges to pick up his gun again and shoot you in the back of the head. Then, this whole business would be over."

"For the both of us, you mean," Anderson said. "You're forgetting that my Lawgiver is pointed at your chest. If I die, I'm taking you with me."

"What, and kill the delightful Suzanne? Not to mention making orphans of her three lovely children? I don't think so, Cassandra. Why do you think I subjected you to that little psycho drama with all the poor innocents getting caught in the crossfire as we blazed away at each other with guns? I wanted you to know what it's like to be the cause of innocent deaths. Though of course, you know that already don't you? What with your sterling service during the Apocalypse War."

"That was war."

"Ah, I see I hit a nerve," Carlyle purred. "I must say it's remarkably easy to push your buttons. No, I don't think you will shoot me, not when that would mean killing Suzanne. Granted, I could be wrong, and frankly, the results would be catastrophic for me if I am wrong. Do you play chess? In chess, they would call this a stalemate. Neither side can win. Of course, there's a difference between games and real life. In games, you just pack up the board and play again tomorrow. "While in real life, people die."

The Grey Man was a Red.

William entered the terminal as the panicking crowds moved in the other directions, and he saw the twin objects of his hatred ahead of him. He could

see Anderson, her soulshadow dazzling and brilliant, but what shocked him was that he could see the Grey Man's soulshadow as well. It was as red as Anderson's, burning with unbearably bright scarlet fire. Seeing it, the rage inside William's heart grew all the wilder. The Grey Man had lied to him. He had betrayed him. He had tried to destroy him. Now, to add insult to injury, it turned out that he had been red all along. Suddenly, the balance of William's hatred shifted where he had once hated both Anderson and the Grey Man equally, now he realised that the Grey Man was the primary target for his vengeance. The Grey Man had tricked him. The Grey Man had deceived him.

The Grey Man must die.

In his hand, William held a las-scalpel that he had found in the ambulance. It was not as reassuringly heavy and solid in his hand as his Bowie knife had been. But the Bowie knife was gone, lost when the Judges had arrested him. The las-scalpel would do its work well enough. The edge was hot and sharp.

Unnoticed as Anderson and the Grey Man talked amongst themselves, William moved closer. Suddenly, the words they were saying slipped through the fog of his mind.

It sounded like they were talking about him.

"Is that what this is all about?" Anderson asked him. "You like to play games? HelixCorp, the murder victims, Mortimer, Ganz. It was all a game?"

"A profitable one, I assure you," Carlyle replied. "Of course, any game must have its pawns. What did you think of Ganz? An interesting specimen, wasn't he?"

"Interesting? I don't know if that's the word I'd use."

"No? Personally, I found him fascinating. His father was a past associate of mine. He was a rather repulsive type, a psychic, like ourselves, whose psi-talent allowed him to create the most realistic illusions. Sadly, those same psychic abilities had left Peter with an unfortunate appetite: fear. If he wasn't able to regularly gorge on human fear, Peter began to sicken and die. Accordingly, he preyed most often on his family members. First, his wife, and then, when he had driven her to suicide, he preyed on his son, William. Really, I suppose it's not surprising that when William's own psi-talents developed, he used them to kill his father. But the really interesting part is

the effect the whole ordeal had on him. William perceived the aura of psychics as red in colour, like his father's. What's more, thanks to his appalling childhood, William experienced psychosomatic pain whenever he saw a red aura. And, of course, that pain drove him to kill. I have to admit that I'd had my eye on the boy for some time, but I'd never had the opportunity to use him. Then, when the HelixCorp matter came along, it seemed a match made in heaven. A very useful pawn, all told. It's a shame really that he's no longer with us."

"Red!"

Startled by a scream behind her, Anderson turned in amazement to see William Ganz charging across the terminal towards Carlyle with a las-scalpel in his hand. Seeing the scalpel himself, Carlyle reacted swiftly, his right hand emerging from his jacket pocket with a small laspistol held inside it. He carefully took aim.

"No!"

As Ganz screamed in rage, the command in his voice deflected Carlyle's aim. His first shot going wild over Ganz's shoulder, Carlyle fired again.

"No!"

Again the command, again the shot went wild. Closing with Carlyle, Ganz stabbed the scalpel into his chest even as Carlyle fired the las-pistol at point-blank range at William's face. His features half burnt away by the blast, William stabbed Carlyle again. Both men were screaming. Horrified, Anderson saw Carlyle's fingers loosen on the grenade, even as the woman Suzanne was released from her paralysis and started screaming herself. Moving swiftly, Anderson did the only thing she could. Leaping across the intervening space, she careened into Ganz and Carlyle, tipping them both onto the revolving baggage carousel behind them. As they fell locked together on the conveyor, still stabbing and shooting at each other as the belt carried them away through the opening in the wall and into the baggage department, Anderson grabbed Suzanne and pushed her to the ground. Diving on top of the struggling woman, Anderson held her tightly to the floor as the two combatants disappeared along the conveyor belt into the opening. Suddenly, the grenade went off, the explosion out of sight, and the sound muffled.

For a moment, everything was still. Then, picking herself up off the floor, Anderson saw that the other Judges had followed her example in diving for cover. It seemed that no one had been injured; the explosion had been

confined to the other side of the carousel. Advancing on the conveyor belt, Anderson carefully looked into the opening to see what had become of Carlyle and Ganz.

Now they were both red.

EPILOGUE

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Carlyle was not dead.

Driving her lawmaster towards Psi Division Headquarters a few weeks later, Anderson brooded on that news as she rode along the megway. She had just received a call from Control informing her of the results of a DNA test performed on the remains of the two bodies on the luggage carousel. The DNA positively identified one of the bodies as belonging to William Ganz. Born in Brit-Cit of British parents, he had lived for most of his life in the Latin American city-state of Ciudad Baranquilla. The other body on the carousel had been identified as that of one Steven Christopher Lincoln, an unemployed former used car salesman reported missing by his family a month ago. The results had been checked and re-checked to ensure their accuracy, but as far as Anderson could see they meant only one thing.

Carlyle was not dead.

Given some thought, she could see how he must have done it. From what she had seen and felt of it, the extent of Carlyle's psi-talent was truly extraordinary. He must have kidnapped Steven Lincoln, subjected him to a face-changer to alter his appearance, and then used his powers from afar to control Lincoln and force him to play the part of an ersatz Carlyle. Presumably, the whole scene at the hoverport had been a gigantic ruse allowing Carlyle to fake his own death. Anderson remembered Mortimer telling her that Carlyle had enemies. She wondered how bad a man's enemies would have to be to make him go to such lengths. Then again, considering the nature of Carlyle himself, she could quite understand that he probably made enemies as easily and as regularly as other people used shampoo.

There had been an even more disturbing revelation recently, however. In their exhaustive trawl through HelixCorp's records, Tek Division had been able to find no reference to the processes that the researchers of Project Changeling had used to breed latent psychics. Worse, the Teks suspected that someone had systematically purged the majority of the information regarding the project from the records. In the meantime, HelixCorp had declared bankruptcy after becoming the target of a number of lawsuits and a dozen different ongoing Justice Department investigations. The remaining

latent psychics from Changeling were currently undergoing evaluation while Psi Division decided what to do with them. The nagging suspicion remained that someone had escaped with the records of Project Changeling before purging all other copies from the HelixCorp database. That person now had control of a secret that was potentially worth billions, even trillions. Gambling on anything other than the Megalot might be illegal in Mega-City One, but Anderson would have been willing to put money on that person being Carlyle.

Still, there was at least one bright spark amid all this doom and gloom.

As she pulled into a parking space in front of the Psi Division Headquarters building, Anderson saw a group of new Psi-Cadet inductees being led down the steps by their Psi-Tutor. It was the most recent intake of cadets to be accepted for training. Most of them were five years of age, but one boy was older and taller than the rest. Strictly speaking, it was against protocol to distract cadets while their Psi-Tutor was talking to them, but Anderson waved at the boy all the same.

Smiling, Psi-Cadet Alexei Voysich waved back.

The synthi-veal parmesan was like chewing dead flakes of skin, the wine list was dismal, the service atrocious, and the robot Mariachi band did nothing for the ambience, but the view. The view made it all worthwhile.

Not the view from the window by his table overlooking the black and toxic waters of the Mediterranean. No, the view that Carlyle found almost enchanting, as he sat at his table in the La Bella Puttana restaurant in the Mediterranean Free States, was the sight of the sweating and overweight figure of Dmitri Vulkharin waddling towards his table.

Ah, the game begins again, he thought. Suddenly, the veal seemed passable and the wine's bouquet reminded him of the aroma of apricots and oranges, rather than sump oil. Even the Mariachi band's ill-considered rendition of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" did not seem entirely inappropriate.

"Carlyle!" As he sat at the table, Dmitri was all boisterous smiles and expansive gestures. "How are you, my friend? You know, I was concerned that you might not make our meeting. One hears the Judges of Mega-City One killed you." He roared with laughter as though he had made a joke.

"You know how it is, Dmitri." Carlyle lifted his glass to the oafish Sov Blocker in a toast. "It can do wonders for one's reputation to return from the dead every now and then."

"Da, I am sure, of course. But you know, friend Carlyle, a little bird tells me that your business trip to Mega-City One was not entirely concerned with such things. This bird, who shall of course remain nameless, tells me that you may have returned with some valuable information."

"Valuable?" Taking another sip, it occurred to Carlyle that the wine was actually quite palatable after all. "Say for example the records of a research project that successfully managed to breed latent psychics? Including all the raw data, experimental protocols, records of the drugs they used, the genes they spliced, and so on. Oh, and did I mention that I happen to have the only remaining copy of this information in the world? Yes, I suppose you could say it was valuable, Dmitri." Looking across the table, he saw the other man's eyes glittering like cold hard marbles. "Though, of course, you will understand if I insist that you meet my price in full before I can allow you to see it. But then, we both know this game of old, Dmitri.

"I'm sure in the end we will be able to come to some kind of *arrangement*."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mitchel Scanlon lives in Derbyshire, England and is a full-time writer. He has written both comic books and prose fiction. He also wrote the first Anderson PSI Division novel, *Fear the Darkness. Red Shadows* is his third novel.